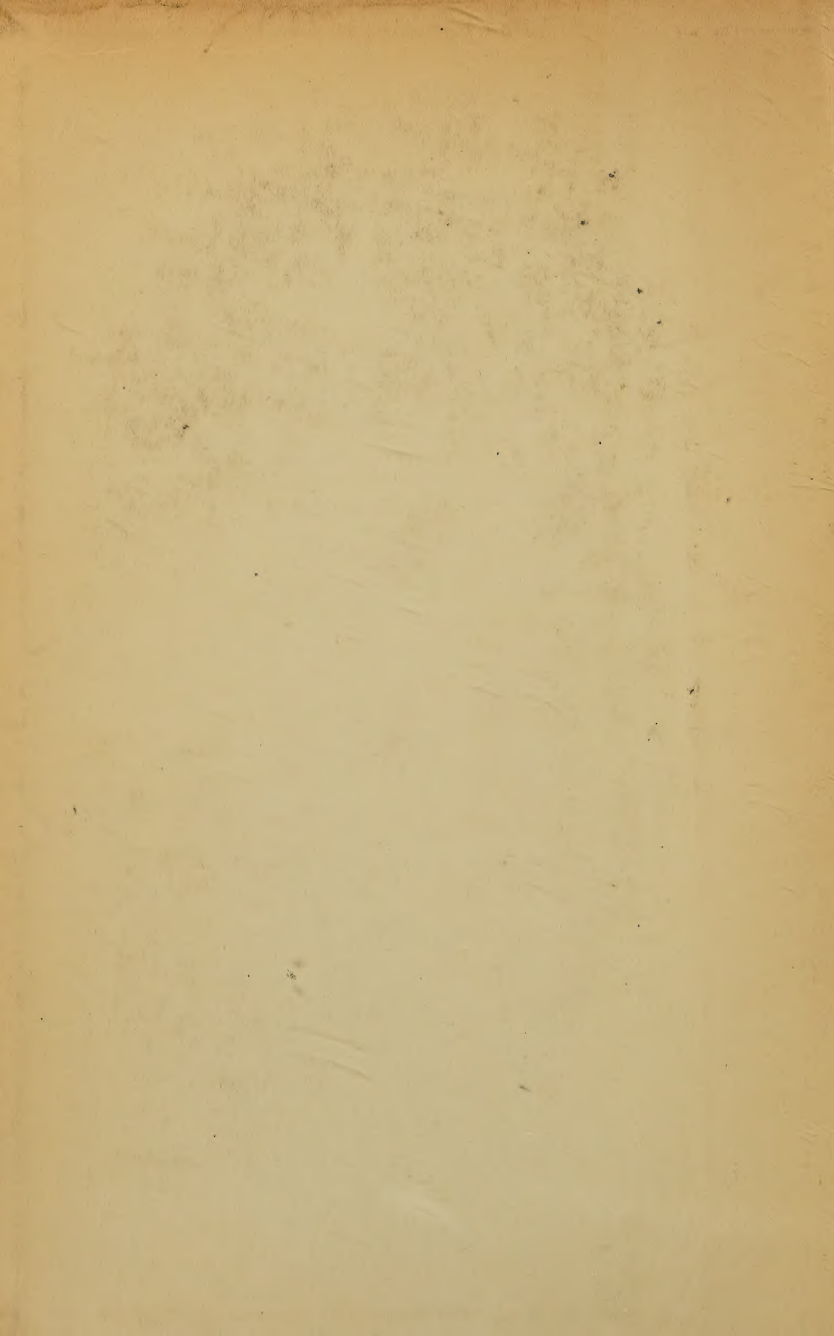
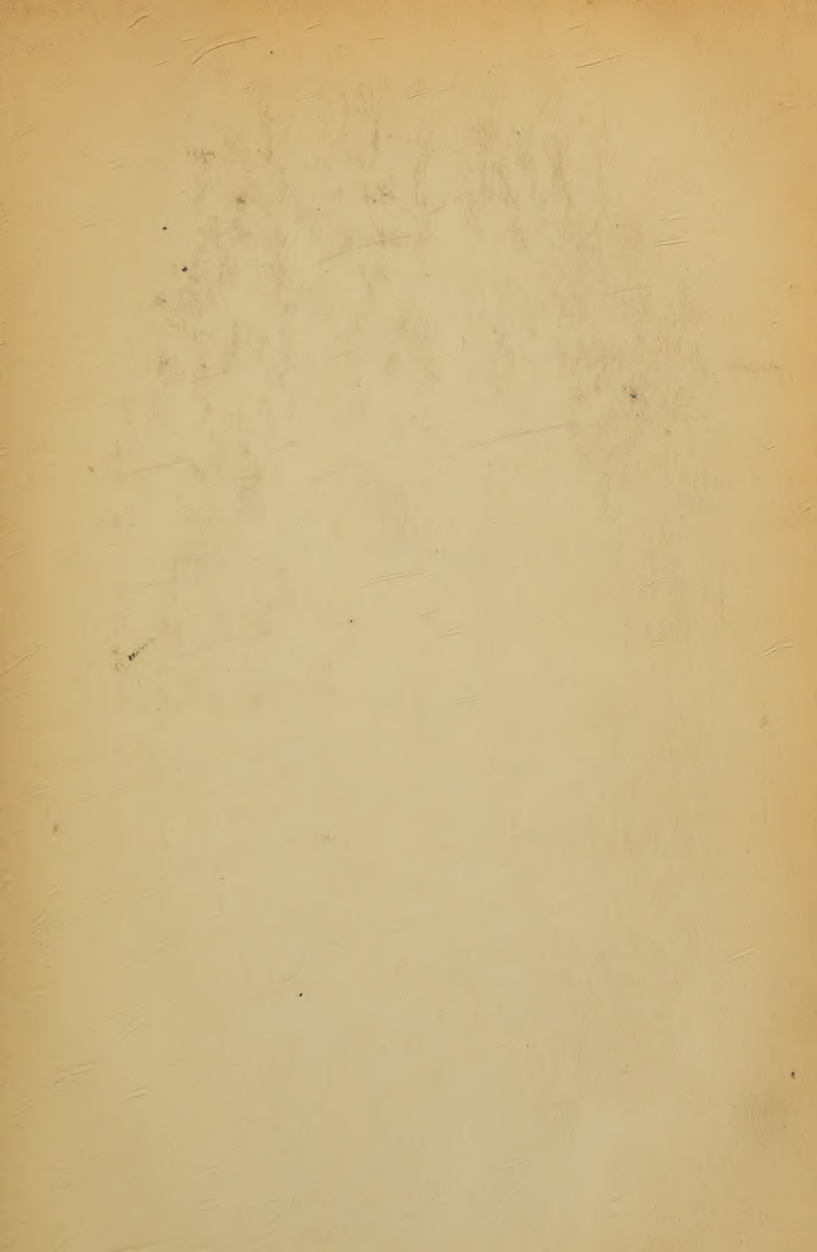


# BLACK BUTTERFLIES



ELIZABETH  
JORDAN









# BLACK BUTTERFLIES

*Books by Miss Jordan*

MISS BLAKE'S HUSBAND  
MAY IVERSON—HER BOOK  
RED RIDINGHOOD  
WINGS OF YOUTH  
THE BLUE CIRCLE  
THE LADY OF PENTLANDS



# BLACK BUTTERFLIES

*A Story of Youth*

BY  
ELIZABETH JORDAN

*"Why Black Butterflies?" Goddard asked. "Why Mohawk Indians?" Chad countered. Then he felt pity for the pilgrim. "I suppose it's because we're as black as we're painted," he cheerfully ended.*

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BLACK BUTTERFLIES

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# BLACK BUTTERFLIES

## CHAPTER I

ORSON HATCH, senior member of the law firm of Hatch, Fuller, and Kimball, relaxed in his swivel chair, rubbed his pink chin with the pink forefinger of a puffy hand, and turned a kindly eye on his client. He was grateful to her, for he was digesting an excellent luncheon, and as yet the demands of her business affairs had not been exacting enough to interfere with the process. Mr. Hatch had reached a stage in his development where meals held an importance in the scheme of things that lessened his zest for other matters. This noon he had eaten a wild duck with fried hominy and plum jelly, and he had resented the necessity of immediately thereafter discussing stocks, bonds, percentages, and the highway of life, with a young person of whose conduct he strongly disapproved. He now admitted, however, that Miss Dorinda Maxwell, despite her temperament and her reputation, was making his task as simple as she could.

Her attitude was one befitting the feminine mind in the presence of its masculine superior. She listened to his exposition with a patience heretofore lacking during their interviews. She made it clear that her faith in him as her business adviser was absolute. And she artlessly mentioned that all she really cared to know about her stocks and bonds and other investments was how much income they would bring her and when that income would be paid.

Being human, Mr. Hatch responded to the flattery of this position. He was even tempted to omit the delivery of an edifying address he had prepared, which was designed to show his caller the error of her ways. To start in on that now would certainly interrupt the placid tenor of the present interview. It would disturb Miss Maxwell, it would disturb him, and it might even disturb the duck. Better, much better, end the audience on its present harmonious note.

Then, most annoyingly, the alarm-clock of his conscience went off, and Hatch, who was an honorable man as well as an indolent one, recognized the call for what it was. He remembered a promise he had made to this girl's father. The job he had undertaken must be properly put through. He sighed, rubbed the bald place on his head with the reflective pink finger, smoothed the white fringe that guarded the spot, and wearily squared himself to the necessary effort. The client facing him was a mere infant of twenty-two, and she was alone in the world. Her father and mother

had been dead less than six months, yet already she had got out of hand. The town was humming with gossip about her. Members of its various circles were rolling scandalized eyes. Yes, he must talk to the girl—but how should he begin? He smiled at her quizzically, and though she had not intended to do so Miss Maxwell returned the smile. She understood what his hesitation had meant. She knew and dreaded what was coming. But when he smiled like that, she reflected, her lawyer looked like an embarrassed baby—an embarrassed baby about a hundred years old. Fortunately for the sensibilities of Mr. Hatch, who was sixty-five and convinced that he did not look a day more than fifty, he could not follow this reflection, though he was rather good at reading the minds of others.

"Don't go yet, Dorinda," he said kindly, observing her restless movement. "The business talk is almost over, but there are several personal matters we have not touched on. For instance, am I right in believing that you are still living alone?"

"Yes, if you don't count two or three old retainers," his visitor lightly admitted.

"Old retainers?" The round, pink, smooth-shaven face of Hatch took on a soft radiance. This *was* a relief! "You mean old servants—your father's housekeeper, for one?"

"Mercy, no!" The girl looked at him with the expression of one who has said farewell to patience. Clearly she was in for a sermon and a cross-examina-

tion, as to her way of living, a subject of interest these days to every one who knew her.

"The old lot went several months ago," she hastily admitted, anxious now to make the inevitable explanation and be through with it. "You know Father left Jane and John Kelly, our cook and butler, three thousand dollars each,—they had been with us twenty years,—so they started a road-house and cabaret near Hastings. They have made it very attractive," she earnestly added. "You ought to go there for dinner sometime. The cooking is wonderful, and they have a splendid floor, and the best music within twenty miles. A lot of us—the Black Butterflies, you know—went out there the other night and danced till breakfast-time. The Kellys would be glad of your patronage. Of course I'm helping them all I can," she virtuously ended, and settled back in her chair with a contented smile.

After that, of course, the deluge. She had cleared the way for the lawyer by admitting all the charges that were in his mind, and she flattered herself she had done it thoroughly. Now, let him rave!

"No doubt they would."

Hatch responded only to her penultimate sentence, his smile fading. There was no question that he had neglected this girl since the death of her parents, and here was one of the results.

"That brings me to something I must say to you,"

he began seriously, while his listener inwardly grimaced. "Of course you realize that to go to a road-house at any time and dance all night with such a group as the one that calls itself the Black Butterflies—" he mentioned the name with distaste—"is a questionable performance. To do it within six months of your parents' death is really a shocking instance of bad taste. You won't mind my saying so—"

"Oh, but I do mind!"

His client, who had been lounging back in her chair with her knees crossed, revealing a surprising length of flesh-colored silk stocking, now sat up straight and looked at him with hard, bright, gray-green eyes. "I mind it very much indeed. And—I'm going to be frank, too—you're simply wasting your breath."

Hatch flushed a deeper pink and rubbed a white eyebrow.

"I must remind you—" he began.

"You need n't remind me of anything. I know my father left instructions for you to keep me in leading-strings. It's just the sort of thing he would do. He had kept me in leading-strings all my life, and he would jerk me about from his grave if he could. As he can't, he left the strings to you. But I don't intend to be pulled by them any longer."

At the look on the lawyer's face she stopped and leaned forward, speaking with a change of manner that included a certain dignity.



"Let's have this out once and for all, Mr. Hatch," she suggested. "You know the kind of man my father was, don't you?"

"Why, I—"

"You know perfectly well that he was the hardest, most contemptible, most hypocritical, most sanctimonious old fraud in this whole region—and that he had n't a friend in the world. Don't you?"

"My dear Dorinda!"

"He broke my mother's heart. Years ago he made her an invalid. Six months ago he killed her as surely as if he had done it with an ax. He had a frightful temper under that pious look of his, and when he got angry he acted like a maniac. He raged into her room that night and bellowed at her for letting me go to Norma Davis's birthday party. It was the only party I had ever been asked to. Norma is one of the nicest girls in town, and she was the only friend I had—the only girl who dared to come near me. But Father hated her because he hated her father. You know, Judge Davis had shown him up several times," she interpolated. "My heart was set on that party," she resumed, as Hatch did not reply, "so Mother took the risk of letting me go, though she knew it would mean a terrible scene. I suppose it was the one brave act of her married life. She had n't much spirit, poor darling. He had taken all that out of her."

She stopped, but Hatch was too wise to speak. The girl's defense was what he wanted, and at last it was

pouring out with a passion that amazed him. He had not known she had such feeling, or such a gift of arraignment. Her life had been spent with an invalid mother and with books. Probably this explained his impression that she suddenly seemed so much older than her age.

"He raised such a row and kept it up so long that mother had a heart attack," she continued, "and she died before morning. When he was killed in that accident a week later I was glad. It seemed to me a judgment on him."

She stopped again, but Hatch still waited for more, and she resumed her defense with the same intensity:

"My father always made my mother's life and my life a horror, and everybody knows he did. He never let any one come to see us. He never gave either of us a gentle word or a kind look. He kept up the house partly because it had family traditions, but principally because he himself was fond of comfort and good eating. Mother and I had very little more place in it than strangers. He would n't give me an education, though I began to beg for it when I was twelve. My mother taught me all she could—luckily for me she was a well-educated woman—and I read everything I could get my hands on. I've read hours and hours every day, all my life, but I had to sneak the books up to my room. He would n't let me come into his library when he was at home. He even resented seeing Mother and me together. He did n't see us often, for I spent my

days in her rooms, and he rarely came there. Naturally, we both hated him. I gave most of my time to hating him. How could I help it? I've always hated him—and I always shall!"

"My dear girl, I admit that your father was a hard man. But remember that he's dead," Hatch broke in, at last.

"Yes, he's dead, but his death does n't canonize him; and I shall never tack any halo on his head!"

"Dorinda!" The lawyer spoke sternly. "It's appalling to hear a young girl talk like that! You ought to have put such bitterness into your father's grave, and let it lie buried with him. After all, you know, he left you everything he had."

"Why would n't he? I was his only child. He would n't have left it to me if he could have helped himself. He never wanted me. He cuffed me around even when I was a baby. I don't know whether you have heard that he used to strike Mother. He did, even after she became an invalid. But he could n't endure the thought of leaving his money to charity; he had never given a cent to anything, you know. So what else could he do but leave it to Mother and me? If only she had lived to be free, too! Can you imagine what it is to me now to open my eyes in the morning, and be able to draw a deep breath and look forward to the day and know I can do anything I like? It's hideously unjust that she should have gone without having that—and died the way she did!"

The young face twitched convulsively and the girl stopped speaking, as if, at last, she had said all there was to say. Hatch took off his eye-glasses and wiped them slowly, turning over in his mind what he had heard.

"Child," he said at last, tapping the glasses on his desk to emphasize his words, "you have had a hard time, and every one admits it. I don't deny that your father was all you say he was. But it's a terrible mistake to cherish such rancor, and to run amuck as you've been doing since his death. Can't you see that it will spoil your whole life?"

She nodded.

"I do see that," she admitted. "I don't want to let it spoil things. But I had to explain to make you understand, and as soon as I begin to talk about my father I see red. That's why I have n't talked before. You've got to understand that if you interfere with me I'll simply drop everything here and get out. I value my liberty more than I do money. If I've got to choose between them I'll throw up the money and keep my freedom, and I'll do it now! I can live like a sparrow, I suppose, as the rest of the Black Butterflies do."

"Dear! dear! this is wild talk."

Hatch was increasingly disturbed. He welcomed an interruption caused by the entrance of his clerk, a tall, broad-shouldered youth, with surprisingly blue eyes, a good-looking, smooth-shaven face, and black hair on a well-shaped head, who came in to show him

some papers. Miss Maxwell regarded the youth with an inner pang as she gave him the bow of casual acquaintance. She had danced with him at the one conventional party she had ever attended—the party from which she had returned to find her mother dying.

“Here, Goddard, this one is n’t right at all!”

Hatch, having replaced his glasses and studied the documents, now spoke with pained emphasis, glad to find an outlet after the strain of the preceding interview.

“Is n’t right, Mr. Hatch?” The blue-eyed young man seemed impressed, but not grieved. Over Hatch’s shoulder he cast a glance of gentle reproach at the documents in the senior partner’s hand. Then, glancing up, he met the eyes of Miss Maxwell and smiled irrepressibly. There was something very attractive about the smile, which subtly suggested that he and she were sharing a joke.

Dorinda returned the smile and gave her courteous attention to the episode. She knew all about this newcomer, and had seen him every time she came to the office. She was glad to have her mind diverted from the memory of that party, and young Goddard’s mischievous grin convinced her that he knew more than his employer did concerning those papers. It would be rather pleasant to see him take a rise out of Mr. Hatch.

“No, not right,” Hatch mourned. “It sometimes seems as if I can’t get anything done properly in these offices,” he added, more in sorrow than in anger.

“But, Mr. Hatch,” the young man respectfully sub-

mitted, "they're drawn from your own memoranda. See, here are the slips."

Hatch glanced at the memoranda and looked more than ever like an embarrassed baby.

"Oh, all right," he said, hastily, and turned to the client. "I wanted you to sign these to-day," he told her, "but they'll have to be gone over.—Here, take them away, Goddard. I'll give you instructions about them later." The young man accepted the papers and faded out of the private office, and the senior partner took up the earlier discussion where it had been interrupted.

"I know how you feel," he admitted, returning to his judicial manner, "and I must say I can't blame you. I don't want to interfere with what you call your liberty, though your money must pass through my hands till you are thirty, unless you marry in the meantime—which, of course, you will do." He disregarded a strongly negative gesture by the girl and went on. "Your father's investments were very conservative and they will be left undisturbed, as I have explained. He was n't a rich man, as wealth is reckoned in these days, but your estate will bring in an income of about twenty-five thousand a year, to be paid to you at my discretion. Living as you do, in this comparatively small community, with two or three servants, your ordinary expenses need not be heavy. You can have practically anything you like, in reason. Certainly I don't want to interfere with you, if I can help it. I'd



much rather not," he added, with such unconscious wistfulness that Dorinda smiled again. Every one in Grandon knew that Orson Hatch "side-stepped" every task he could, and almost every one wondered why old Maxwell had put into Hatch's plump and indolent hands such power over his daughter. The reason was simple. No one else Maxwell trusted would accept the responsibility and Hatch had taken it only because he had not let himself realize what it would mean. As if the client's smile reminded him of something, the lawyer's manner hardened.

"At the same time," he continued, in a different tone, "we must remember that your father gave me a great deal of discretion, which it will be my duty to exercise if your conduct and associates are not what I can approve. And I must say," he discontentedly added, "they have both aroused considerable doubt in my mind."

She took this in silence and he forced himself to go on:

"I'm not speaking of the all-night dancing; I know most of our young folks go in for that these days. But your associates! Those Black Butterflies you have joined," he brought out. "Surely you know that club is made up of the most disreputable young persons in town. They have no social standing, and their escapades are notorious. The things they do may be all right for young-old, sophisticated infants who are racing to destruction under the impression that they are

taking a joy-ride; but they won't do for you. Why in Heaven's name did you take up with them?"

The girl's response was dry:

"Because they were willing to take up with me. You must admit there was n't exactly a rush to do that, among others."

"Others were giving you time to turn around, and to readjust," Hatch said curtly.

"They certainly did it."

"You were supposed to be in deep mourning. If you had been patient—" Suddenly the lawyer's patience snapped. "I'm going to check up on you whenever I think it's necessary," he announced, "and I'm going to begin right now by asking you a few questions. Was it worth while to get everybody by the ears at the very outset of your new life? What did you expect to gain?"

"My liberty."

"You've got your liberty," Hatch wearily pointed out. "Why abuse it?"

As she made no answer, he asked another question:

"What servants have you put in to replace the Kellys?"

"Three new ones, all young. I want some youth around me for a change. We had five in Father's time," Dorinda went on, "the Kellys and Nora, Mother's nurse, and Jenkins the gardener, and Scott, who was Father's coachman at first and afterward our chauffeur. Father left legacies to them all except

Nora, and they all got out. Nora left right after Mother's death. Naturally, they felt that they needed a rest after twenty years of life in our house," she bitterly ended.

"It was generous of your father to leave them legacies, was n't it? I confess I was surprised when he did it," Hatch mused aloud.

"It was only part of his selfishness. He wanted to be comfortable, and he hated strangers around him. The servants knew his ways and waited on him hand and foot. But they were always threatening to go, after his rages, and he finally promised he would leave pensions to those who stayed more than twenty years. That held them, of course."

Hatch put his question in another form:

"Then what did you mean by the 'old retainers' you have now?"

"I like the idea of old family servants, myself," Miss Maxwell placidly testified, "and I'm starting another collection. They have stayed six months, so I suppose they can be called old retainers even now. Anyhow, they will be some day. I have only three—a cook, a waitress, and a boy for the garden and for errands. Of course I drive my own cars and take care of them." She shot a direct glance at him. "Now we understand each other, don't we, Mr. Hatch? Talk all you like, but there must n't be any real interference with me."

"Not as long as you don't get over the traces," Hatch conceded. "But I'm beginning to think you're

going to, and if you do I will certainly draw the purse-strings tight. Those were your father's orders. God knows I'd rather forget all about you!" he fervently added. "Why don't you get married to some one I can approve?—I've got to approve before you can marry, you know."

"Please don't speak of that."

"Then why not—"

"Hire a companion? I know. Oh, how sick I am of having that preached to me!" Dorinda cried. "Every woman in this region—even if she won't know me—wants to find a 'suitable' companion for me. They've sent dozens of applicants to the house. Suitable companion!" She ejected the words with contempt. "I will tell you one thing," she ended. "If any suitable companion comes to live with me, I'll bite her! There is n't any one on earth, man, woman or child, that I want around me all the time; and that's flat."

It was so flat that the lawyer felt rather flattened by it, but he rallied.

"Just the same, there's a point of view I'll ask you to consider," he mentioned. "You want to get all you can out of this new freedom of yours, don't you?—all sorts of different experiences?"

"Of course I do. That's what I'm after."

"Then let me remind you, purely as a matter of common sense, that there's only one kind of life and freedom for a girl who has lost her reputation. Don't

get angry," he added, as she flushed; "simply think it over. If she has lost her reputation she can have all she wants of one sort of experience, and only one. She will miss all the other kinds; and the other kinds are what every normal girl is after."

"You talk as if I meant to make myself an outcast," the listener muttered resentfully.

"Of course you don't mean to," the oracle conceded. "But a girl who gets even the undeserved reputation of being an outcast might almost as well be one. She has cut herself away from the best in life. Mind you, I'm not talking of morals and self-respect alone," he interpolated. "I'm talking of the social life and friendships one loses. A community like ours is very critical; a girl who dances at a road-house all night with such rowdy companions as you have chosen may get away with the adventure a few times, but if she keeps it up—"

She interrupted him.

"Mr. Hatch," she said abruptly, "you have been hearing a lot of gossip about me, have n't you?"

He met her eyes.

"I'm sorry to say that I have, Dorinda."

"Is it pretty bad?"

"Frankly, yes. It is pretty bad."

"What are folks saying?"

He decided that it would be salutary to give her a straight report.

"The general impression," he gravely told her, "is

that you have lost your head and are on the toboggan slide. Personally, I don't share it. I think you are merely sowing a few wild oats, after a very repressed life. But I also think you are taking a lot of unnecessary risks in the way you 're doing it. Your intimates are the worst riff-raff in town—Chad Bailey, and Jim Bryant, and Kitty Perkins! Is n't Miss Perkins 'the President of the Black Butterflies?"

"Yes, but Norma Davis is my friend, too," Dorinda muttered, defensively.

"*Was*—not is," Hatch suavely corrected. "I 'm told that Judge Davis has put a stop to the friendship."

Dorinda started and her face flushed again. For a moment she did not speak. It was plain that she was dazed by what she had heard. The lawyer followed up his effect.

"Norma Davis is about the finest all-'round girl in town," he went on, "and yet, as you young folks would say, she is n't a 'dead one,' either. She 's an ideal companion for you, and worth a thousand of the Kitty Perkins type. Yet you've lost her. Is it worth while?" he urgently repeated. "And that's only the beginning. The battered and tattered and begrimed will rally 'round you fast enough if you want them. You 'll never lack companions, of a sort. But from now on, unless you change your ways, the Norma Davises are apt to stand aloof. And *how* you 'll want the Norma Davises as the years go on!"

He realized that she was not listening.



"That's why Norma Davis does n't come any more, then," she murmured, following her own thoughts. "I've wondered about it. . . ."

Hatch looked at the bowed young head. For the moment his carefully cultivated selfishness fell away from him and his heart ached for the girl. She was so young, so alone, so pretty, so inexperienced, so cocksure, so stiff-necked. Of course she wanted the love and friendship she had never had, and she was reaching out to where she thought she could get them. Under the influence of this analysis he spoke more impulsively than he had done for years.

"Listen to me, child," he said, bending across his desk to emphasize his remarks with a wagging pink forefinger. "I'm telling you something. The Black Butterflies of the world will get you if you don't watch out! I've got to warn you. I'm the only one who has the right. Besides, I've known you all your life."

He heard his own words with surprise. It was n't like him to get stirred up about anything or anybody, and probably it was not worth while, for his valedictory seemed to have left the girl unimpressed. She rose and held out a small, firm hand.

"You have n't known me all my life, Mr. Hatch," she gently corrected. "You were the only man who ever came to our house, but you never came except on business, and you never knew me at all. All you saw was a long-legged, frightened youngster scurrying into dark corners when she heard her father's voice.

But I know you mean to be kind, and I'll think over what you have said."

Hatch, who had risen to face her, pressed the small hand.

"Do," he urged, and again the embarrassed old baby, suddenly self-conscious, smiled at her. "And while you're thinking, engage a good chaperon and revise your address-book!"

She shook her head.

"I'm not promising anything, except to think."

She departed, and young Goddard, who happened to appear at that moment with another sheaf of papers, hastened to open the door for her.

Having glanced over the papers and dismissed the clerk, Hatch relaxed into his cushioned chair and wiped his pink brow with a spotless handkerchief. He felt tired and depressed. He was sure to have a lot of trouble with that girl! He ought to have taken her in hand months ago, before things got to such a pass. His own eloquence had impressed him, if it had not affected her, and he saw the town's radicals and wastrels increasingly closing around her. However, he assumed that up till now no great harm was done. These days all young things talked about "wanting to live," and seemingly most of them thought the words had only one meaning. Perhaps they had. But the eyes of Dorinda, though they held the ravenous hunger of youth, were pools that reflected none of the darker aspects of living. He hoped he had spoken in

time to save the foolish child from any serious results of her foolishness.

His thoughts turned to his dinner. Some broiled sweetbreads, perhaps, or grouse, and a glass or two of dry champagne might brighten him up. Nothing like a good meal to cheer a man after a hard day. The interview just ended had been a strain. But it had been effective; by this time Hatch was sure of that. He must feel sure of it, to quiet his infernal conscience. He would keep a close eye on the girl in future, if he could remember to do it. . . .

He relaxed deeper into the swivel chair, eyes closed and pink hands comfortably folded on his globular stomach, while he considered the respective merits of sweetbreads or grouse. The picture of Dorinda Maxwell and the black butterflies of the world faded out of his consciousness.

## CHAPTER II

**A**FTER all this effort it was disconcerting for Orson Hatch to learn, the following week, that his words had fallen on heedless ears. Miss Maxwell had given a party, "a particularly lively party," his informant darkly mentioned, only three days after her call at the law offices. Hatch gathered that the tongues of her neighbors were exhausted by the labor of discussing the hectic details of this party. He frowned severely at his informant, who happened to be John Kimball, one of his partners.

"What the devil is the girl thinking of?" he irritably demanded; and when Kimball looked at him in surprise, he added resentfully: "I thought I had straightened her all out when she was here the other day. I talked to the creature like a Dutch uncle!"

Kimball nodded, tactfully concealing his conviction that Hatch could not, under any circumstances, say anything that would impress any girl. He was a small man with a misleading expression of mildness, but he held opinions that exploded like bombs, though he had learned to avoid trouble by talking very little. He now refrained from expressing his theory that if Hatch ate less and thought more he would not get the firm into such a hole as the Maxwell affair was proving to be.

"When was the party?" Hatch asked.

"Last night."

"What are people saying about it?"

"Oh, that it appeared to be the limit. 'Necking' groups, and 'twosing' in upstairs chests, and a lot of drinking—all that sort of thing. Goddard may be able to tell you," he hastily added, as Hatch showed an inclination to break out again. "What I heard about the affair, beyond the bare fact that it took place, was something that ass Simpkins was telling Goddard this morning. Or you might ask Miss Maxwell for the details," he added helpfully. "Is n't she coming down to-day to sign some papers?"

"She is not," Hatch grimly assured him. "I'm sending them up to her. Two interviews in seven days with that young person seem more than my constitution will stand. Of course I've got to see her," he ruefully admitted, "but not till I've decided what to do—" He broke off. "Send Goddard in here," he ended.

Goddard entered without the air of awe which would have been seemly in so young a man when in the presence of an established light of the bar.

"Are those Maxwell papers right yet?" Hatch asked, without looking up.

"Yes, sir. Here they are."

Hatch took them and glanced over them gloomily, experiencing a slight annoyance at finding nothing to complain about. When one has broken an excellent

habit of restraint for the sake of a client, it is disappointing to find the client unworthy of the effort made. The future, with that client in its immediate foreground, was a depressing vista to Hatch.

"Take them out to Miss Maxwell's house," he said at last, pushing the papers toward the young man. "The trolley goes within half a mile of it. Better telephone first and make an appointment. From what I hear of the young lady," he darkly added, "I fancy she is n't gracing the family hearthstone much of the time."

"Yes, sir." Goddard took the papers and turned toward the door. "Anything else?"

"Yes. Tell her I want to see her at four to-morrow, when I've given her case a little more thought. And, by the way, what do you know about that party of hers last night?"

Goddard permitted himself a glance of surprise.

"I was n't there, sir. I have never met Miss Maxwell outside of this office, except the night of Miss Davis's party."

"I'm not asking if you were at Miss Maxwell's party," Mr. Hatch pointed out, eagerly grasping this legitimate excuse for annoyance. "I'm asking what you know about it."

"Nothing at all, except from hearsay."

"Well, what have you heard?"

The manner of Mr. Goddard became more deferential.

"Nothing, Mr. Hatch, except gossip—"



"Well, *well*—"

"Which is too trivial to repeat," the young man ended sedately. "I will telephone Miss Maxwell at once," he added, as the door closed on his modest exit.

Hatch stared resentfully at its polished panels. Then his innate fair-mindedness asserted itself. Of course the cub was within his rights in refusing to repeat a lot of stuff that might hurt the girl. Come to think of it, he rather liked Goddard on the rare occasions when the young man really crossed his line of vision. Now he must decide what steps to take about this girl. She was n't playing the game; she really was n't. Most annoying. He would have to talk to Kimball about cutting her income in two. That might put on the brakes a bit. He glanced at the clock. Almost twelve. Time to plan what to have for luncheon. Something rather delicate. That grouse the other night had been a trifle too high.

In the telephone booth young Goddard was calling for Miss Maxwell. Up till the night of Norma's dance she had been merely a name to him and a strikingly pretty girl he had passed occasionally on the streets. Now that he knew her, had danced with her, and had met at close range her defiant and unhappy young eyes, he felt very sorry for her. In his mental vernacular, she was "up against it." She was "on the toboggan," and from all he had heard she was due to strike the bottom of the slide with a bad crash. Yet she had not

seemed at all like that sort of girl, the night of the dance at Norma's. She had been merely young and inexperienced and pathetically happy. They had danced together twice, and she had danced very badly and had confessed that she knew almost nothing about dancing. Evidently she had made long strides since then.

Her voice came to him over the wire and he hastened to give her his message:

"Miss Maxwell? Goddard speaking—for Hatch, Fuller, and Kimball, you know. We have those papers ready for your signature, and Mr. Hatch would like them signed to-day. May I bring them up early in the afternoon? At three? That's fine. Thanks."

He hung up the receiver with a grin. The girl's voice sounded a little like the morning after. He suspected that she would look like the morning after, too. He was mighty sure she didn't want to bother about legal papers, and he rather admired the sporting spirit she had shown in making the appointment. Almost any other young thing who had danced till four in the morning, had then taken an impromptu bath, on a wager, in the fountain on her front lawn, and had followed the bath by motoring out to Kelly's road-house for breakfast, might easily feel somewhat faded now. As good measure she had thrown in a slight automobile collision on the way home, and she and the three friends with her were reported to have been badly shaken up. Incidentally she had given the town a lot more to talk

about. Poor little idiot! *What* a mess she was making of the fine adventure of life!

But the young person who greeted him at three o'clock that afternoon did not look at all like an object of sympathy. She was rather pale, but she was charmingly dressed and she received him in a really beautiful room, brightened by chrysanthemums and with logs blazing in a huge fireplace. The outer world was in the grip of late November and a mild snow-storm was in progress. Goddard had made the three-mile run to the suburbs in an icy street car, and had then walked another half mile to the old Maxwell house, which sat far back in its grounds aloofly surveying its neighbors over a woodbine-covered field-stone wall. He liked comfort as much as any normal young man, and the contrast between this room and the outer world was pleasant. He threw his overcoat across the back of a chair and buoyantly approached the fire where the girl sat waiting for him. He had brought a fountain-pen, and the transaction between them would be an affair of minutes only; but he inwardly admitted that she had given him a picture to carry away. She had the reputation of being a beauty, but he had not realized that she was so pretty. For the office visits she had worn a fur coat and one of those small close-fitting hats in which a woman is said to be both blind and deaf, and which so sadly limits the degree of visibility of her features. The night of the Davis party she had been very badly dressed. He remembered her hair, and

to-day he saw it again—a lovely, boyish-bobbed, bronze-toned mass of hair, with lights in it. And her eyes—gray—no, green, really—and the sweetness of her mouth as she suddenly and unexpectedly smiled at him, nodding toward a big chair beside her.

“Sit down,” she invited. “You really run the Hatch offices, don’t you? I’ve seen you every time I’ve gone there, and you are the only person who seems to do anything.”

“I’m the only clerk,” he sedately explained. “Naturally I show myself to clients as much as I can, with the idea of taking them away from the firm as soon as I’m admitted to the bar.”

She smiled again.

“I know you are studying for the bar. Norma Davis told me. You and she are great friends, are n’t you? She and I are friends, too, you know.”

He met this with a conventional murmur to which she did not listen.

“I don’t believe you will have much trouble in taking the clients away when the time comes,” she went on. “The firm always seems asleep to me, though I must admit that Mr. Hatch woke up for a few minutes the other day. Does any one but you really do anything?” she persisted.

“Oh, yes. Mr. Hatch eats, and Mr. Fuller adorns society, and Mr. Kimball spends a lot of time disapproving of them both. Kimball really works, though. There’s always some one who has to, you know, to

keep things going, and he's it in that firm. But Mr. Hatch is a big lawyer. He has one of the finest legal minds in the State when he wakes up, as you say, and his integrity is a rock of Gibraltar. Of course he does wake up, too, when Kimball or the clients take things to him. But he's getting frightfully lazy."

Goddard listened to himself in amazement. This sort of thing was n't at all up to the standard of loyalty he had set for himself. He was talking to the girl as intimately as if they were old friends. He had not said as much about the members of the firm to any of his associates. He smiled at himself. He was doing it simply to prolong the interview—to keep out of the wet and to look at a pretty girl in a beautiful setting. How the big paneled room became her! It was old Maxwell's library, of course. He remembered hearing that the late Horace's redeeming feature, if he had one, was a love of books. According to rumor, he had spent most of his time shut up in that library, and neither his wife nor his daughter had been permitted to cross the threshold during his presence there. What a devilish time this girl must have had! No wonder her lovely face was rather hard. The reflection struck him suddenly, and he looked at her solemn-eyed.

Probably the reason she had stuck in his mind since the party was that her mother had died that night. The drama of it had hit him. The girl's one good time—her Cinderella outing—and that grim aftermath. When they telephoned for her he had brought her home,

and had lingered in the hall to see if there was anything more he could do; but there was n't. She had come downstairs again to tell him so. Poor kid!

As if she followed his thoughts, she spoke abruptly.

"I want to thank you again for bringing me home that night."

"Please don't. I was sorry I could n't do more. I must n't forget to give you a message from the chief," he went on briskly, and added the summons for the next day, while she shrugged distastefully.

"I think I know what that means," she admitted.

Remembering his errand, Goddard took the packet of papers from an inside pocket and offered it to her, searching in another pocket for the elusive fountain-pen as he did so. She ignored the papers.

"I hear from all sides," she said suddenly, "that you are the town's model young man. How does it feel to be so universally respected?"

The direct attack was so sudden that he winced. Then he turned his wide smile on her. He had the most likeable smile she had ever seen. When he was not smiling his face was too serious for his years, which, she decided, could not be more than twenty-three or twenty-four.

"Some one has been slandering me," he assured her.

"No, I believe it's the truth. If it were not, you would n't be such a pal of Judge Davis and of Norma."

He tried to divert her attention to a side issue.

"You and Norma are pals, too."



"We were. We are n't now ; at least, I 'm told we 're not. I often wondered why Norma did n't bring you here, on the rare occasions when she deigned to come herself. Now I understand. She wanted to keep you as you are—unspotted from the world."

"That 's an awful thing to say to a fellow," he murmured.

"Is it? I 'm sorry. I suppose I ought n't to have said it, but the thought came and I 'm getting a bad habit of saying anything I think. That 's one of the advantages of being an outcast, you know. One can say anything ; and one does. The frankness in my set is terrifying."

He looked at her soberly.

"You really ought n't to say you 're an outcast. That 's the sort of thing one must n't even joke about."

She laughed delightedly.

"I 've lost my wager," she cried. "Chad said I would, and he 's usually right, even when he can't talk straight."

As Goddard stared uncomprehendingly she added :

"I made a bet with Chad Bailey about you a few minutes before you came in. He bet that you would be uttering advice and moral maxims within ten minutes of the time you got here, and I bet that you would n't. Of course, to be sportsmanlike, I had to give you the chance, and you took it."

He told himself that she deserved all she had got and

was still to get from life: but he showed no sign of irritation.

"Sorry," he said, easily. "Was it a big bet?"

"No. If it had been, poor Chad could n't have paid it if he'd lost; but, then, he never pays his losses. He's great on collecting, though, so I shall have to go downtown and get his gloves this afternoon."

She broke off and gave him a straight look.

"It's nice of you to take it that way. Some men would have been furious."

"I'm too noble," he said, simply. "Now, if you will sign those papers—"

"If you begin to fuss about them I shall think you really are annoyed—underneath that seeming calm. I'll sign the papers when I get ready. I'm a valuable client to your firm, you know," she added coolly, "and I don't like to be rushed."

"Take your time. I'm happy."

"Are you, really? Then answer my question. How does it feel to be the town's model young man?"

"The experience has its moments," the model young man placidly assured her. "When people begin to have parades for me and present me with loving-cups, it will be rather jolly. But of course it's a nuisance to have little boys follow me in the streets in the hope of learning my secret."

"What is your secret?"

He shook his head at her.

"Just as curious as the little boys," he said reproachfully, and they both laughed.

"Too bad it's too early for tea," she murmured. "I'd offer you some. As it is, will you have a whisky and soda or a cocktail?"

He shook his head again.

"Tut, tut! Would you undermine the foundations of the town's moral pillar?" He looked around. "Jove!" he murmured longingly, "I'd like to read and study in this room!"

She checked a laugh, realizing that he was serious.

"It is a nice old room," she agreed. "My grandfather furnished it. He built the house, too. This is the kind of room that cries out for the right sort of book-lover. I often wonder how it endured Father so long."

Not being able to think of the right answer to this interesting speculation, Goddard remained silent. For a moment both pairs of young eyes, hers gray-green and vividly alight, his blue and thoughtful, stared into the heart of the fire. Then he rose with an unconscious sigh, and, having found the fountain-pen, drew a small table before her and laid the papers on it. She looked up at him as he stood waiting, and accepted the pen, but hesitated.

"So the uplifting influence must pass on and out," she said ironically. "Won't it send you back into the world an even stronger, nobler young man to know that the memory of this beautiful half-hour—"

"Come, now, you've jollied me enough." The youth spoke firmly, and with a sudden set to his square jaw and a shuttered look that surprised her. "Sign the papers, please."

"He becomes masterful," she murmured with awe; but she signed the papers and he blotted them, then gave her a forgiving grin.

There was a sudden clamor of voices in the hall. The door of the library blew open, and three young persons ostentatiously assisted one another into the room. Goddard, having taken the papers from the hand of Miss Maxwell, straightened and looked the group over, nodding as he recognized individuals. The thin, blond, reedy youth with a face oddly suggesting a faun's, and with a faun's lightness and grace of movement, was Chad Bailey. Goddard had heard that Bailey was proud of this resemblance and deliberately fostered it by prancings and caperings and the blowing of imaginary pipes in his gayest moments. Indeed, in Paris he had been painted as a faun, and he was in the habit of exhibiting half-tone reproductions of this work of art, while he vaguely explained that the original was in one of the big galleries. He had a long, pointed face, and very white, pointed teeth, which were usually revealed in care-free smiles. There was said to be some speculation over his ears, which were always covered by his thick, over-long blond hair.

The girl, Goddard knew, was Kitty Perkins,

Grandon's pet illustration of a wasted life. At a casual glance Miss Perkins gave no indication of the white flame of genius that burned within her. She was merely a thin, plain, red-haired girl, addicted to shell-rimmed spectacles, wabby coiffures, and "artistic" gowns in primary colors. Her hands were beautiful. So were her red-brown eyes, when one really saw them. And when she sat at the piano and played, the flame within her shone through and one thought one saw a radiant creature, misty and shimmering; but that was merely the effect of Kitty's music.

Of Bryant, Goddard knew less, and liked less what he knew. Bryant looked five years older than the other two, who were in their early twenties; and though they had their followers, he appeared to have no friends but them. He was slender, dark, dour-looking, immaculate as to dress, and with a highly premature bald spot. His diction and his speaking voice were things of genuine beauty, and he called attention to these by frequently criticizing the voices and diction of others. The members of this triumvirate, Goddard knew, were the boon companions of Horace Maxwell's daughter. All three wore the cap of their sophistication on one side.

Chad Bailey lurched toward the pair by the fireplace and waved a vague paw. He was very drunk.

"Lil Bopeep losh 'er sheep," he remarked. "Lef' 'em in d-ing-room. But 'er sheep knew where t' fin' her, all ri', all ri'. Shining papers wish perf'ly proper

young man. Shay!" He steadied under the influence of a sudden memory. "How 'bout lil bet? Do I win 'r do I loosh?"

"You win, Chad. I must stop betting with you, for you always win."

Dorinda spoke pleasantly, but the caller had a fleeting impression that the abrupt appearance of her devoted sheep had not pleased the shepherdess. Assisted by a few pieces of furniture, Bailey reached Goddard's side. He was still in the evening clothes he had worn the night before, and, though they had been taken off and dried, the garments were much the worse for the fountain bath he had shared at dawn with his hostess.

"'Lo, ol' man," he said cordially, and clutched Goddard's arm to steady himself against the eccentricities of a swaying room. "Glad t' shee you. Always glad t' shee you. Steady re-re-li'ble fellow. Mos' ex'mpl'ry. Everbo'y shays sho."

David slipped from under the clutching hands. For the moment the faun was an unattractive sight—an impression his hostess seemed to share, for she spoke hurriedly:

"Chad, for Heaven's sake go home and take a cold bath! You promised you 'd go right after lunch if I let you stay till then. Now keep your word, if you can navigate."

To Goddard she added tersely:

"I have n't been able to get rid of these three. They pretend they were hurt in the collision, but they



were n't. They've been dozing around on the rugs and couches all morning, and drinking every time they woke up. Chad's the worst; at least he makes more fuss than the others. I can't manage him, myself, and I have n't any men-servants now. Jim's worse than no one, as an aide."

Goddard rallied to the unspoken request.

"Is your car in commission after the accident?" he asked. "If it is, I'll take him home."

"The sedan is n't, but the roadster is. I'll be most awfully obliged if you will get him away."

Suddenly the law clerk realized that this was what he had been kept waiting for—the duty of acting as nurse to the besotted youth before him. A healthy anger rose in him.

"All right," he said briefly. "Where's his hat and coat?"

She gave him a quick glance in recognition of the change of tone.

"Here. Annie brought them in."

But Bailey had no desire to put on his hat and coat. He dropped into a chair and good-humoredly but with surprising firmness pushed the garments away.

"Go 'long," he protested. "W'h'sh idea? Daysh young."

"Stand up."

Chad blinked under the crisp order, but sat still.

"Shay—" he began.

He was on his feet, his hat and coat were on, he was propelled rapidly toward the door.

"If you will bring the roadster to the side entrance," Goddard told Dorinda over his shoulder, "I'll put him into it."

There was a slight delay in the appearance of the car, which Bailey filled with conversation. It developed that his opinion of Goddard was not and had never been really high. He recalled that the model young man had some faults, which he mentioned. He was also inclined to be critical of hostesses who turned gentlemen out into stormsh. He dwelt so earnestly on his grievances, and indulged so freely in gesture and clutches that Goddard finally tied his arm behind him and fastened a silk handkerchief over his mouth, above which his goggling eyes blinked amazedly.

Dorinda, appearing at the side door with the roadster, found Goddard controlling her trussed guest with one arm, while Mr. Bryant and Miss Perkins, seated side by side on the lowest step of the stairs leading from the rear veranda to the side driveway and reclining heavily on each other's shoulders, alternated in advice and rousing cheers. Goddard greeted her appearance with a relief natural in these conditions.

"Can you keep him in and drive, too?" she anxiously inquired. "If Jim could sit up straight he could help, but as it is, he would only be another burden. Perhaps I'd better go along."

The town's model young man was by this time somewhat on the edge of his nerves, which perhaps condones the fact that his reply lacked polish.

"Nothing doing," he said brusquely. He tossed the trussed figure of Mr. Bailey into the roadster as if it had been a bag of meal, and as he grabbed the wheel he added his valedictory. "If I could n't manage that stuffed manikin with one hand," he said, "I'd put on petticoats."

The next instant the roadster whirled down the driveway, the sound of its departure nicely accented by a final cheer from the appreciative Miss Perkins and Mr. Bryant.

### CHAPTER III

**H**ALF an hour later Annie, Miss Maxwell's waitress, entered the library where her mistress sat alone.

"The roadster came back, miss," she reported.

"Good. Ask Mr. Goddard to come in."

"Mr. Goddard has gone, miss."

"Gone!" Dorinda turned to look at her in surprise. "But I told you I wanted to see him," she reminded the maid.

"Yes, miss. I told Mr. Goddard that, but he was in a hurry to get back to his office."

"What did he say?"

"He left his apologies, miss—an' regrets."

"Did he say anything else?"

"Yes, miss, but only to me, personal like."

"What was it?"

Annie hesitated, but she was young and there were few bright spots in her life. Moreover, being herself a conventional maiden, she did not approve of Miss Maxwell's goings on, and was seriously thinking of throwing up her situation. Both these considerations dictated her truthful reply.

"He said, miss," she primly reported, "that he had

wasted more time on you already than he could afford."

At sight of the tide of scarlet which flooded her mistress's face Annie's warm heart reproached her.

"I'm sorry, miss," she hastily added, "but you made me tell. An' of course the young man never thought I'd be passin' it on."

"All right, Annie. Have Mr. Bryant and Miss Perkins really left?"

"Yes, miss; they went the last time ten minutes ago, cheerin' and helpin' each other down the driveway, with all the neighbors lookin' out the windows at them," Annie austere submitted, "and they ain't come back. So this time I guess they're gone for good."

"I'll wager the neighbors were looking," Dorinda sighed. Her thoughts returned to her late guests. "The wretches," she murmured forgivingly. "They said they were too stiff to move, but it was only an excuse. What they wanted was to stay on and drink themselves into a stupor.—That's all, Annie," she hastily added, remembering the waiting maid. "I'll have a note ready in five minutes. Come then and get it, and have Johnny take it in town to Mr. Goddard's office."

When Annie had left the room Dorinda went over to her father's colonial writing-desk and sat down before it. She had not yet lost the sense of uneasiness that from the first had accompanied this simple action. Her father's sacred desk, where he kept his sacred papers and his sacred accounts—all of them so much

more sacred to him than his wife and daughter! If there were a next world and Horace Maxwell had a place in it, and could look back on this one, Dorinda reflected, he would have his purgatory in seeing any one else at that desk.

She seized a sheet of the flamboyant writing-paper she now used—deep cream with a black butterfly across the top—and wrote rapidly:

Miss Maxwell realizes with regret that to-day Mr. Goddard gave her affairs more of his time than he could afford. She therefore incloses her check for twenty-five dollars in payment, and begs Mr. Goddard to accept it with her thanks.

"There won't be an answer," she told Annie, with a complacent smile, when the girl returned for the note. To herself she added, "That will teach him a lesson!"

But there was an answer, and Johnny, the boy of all work, brought it in to her within the next hour. As Dorinda opened it her check dropped from the envelope to the floor.

DEAR MISS MAXWELL [the note read]:

Of course I can't accept your check. The little I did was not in the line of my office activities, so there is no question of a fee.

If there were a charge, by the way, it would have to be made by Hatch, Fuller, and Kimball. And how the deuce would they bill it?

Sincerely yours,

DAVID GODDARD.



The impertinence of that! Dorinda set her teeth and threw the note and check into a fire that seemed very little hotter than her own angry face. She was furious, but when her rage had cooled there was satisfaction in realizing that she had made Goddard furious, too. The pregnant phrase of his note recurred to her:

"The little I did was not in the line of my office activities . . ." Impertinence! Impertinence! And yet, of course, he was right. A lawyer's clerk, bringing some papers to a client to be signed, does not expect to run into an intoxicated house party, or to be asked to take charge of a young sot not able to look after himself. Chad was a dear boy, but he had been a nuisance to-day. He was rarely wholly sober, and frequently he was wholly drunk, as he had been this afternoon when he clearly felt that his supposed injuries were so good an excuse. Not that Chad needed any excuse, at any time. Jim Bryant had been a nuisance, too. Even Kitty was sometimes a nuisance, despite her marvelous music. It was one thing to have a good time at night, Dorinda's thoughts continued, with the house lit up and dance music going on, and it was quite another thing to have an intoxicated group under one's feet all morning in various stages of dress and undress, and to have guests reeling down her driveway and out of her entrance gates in broad daylight. . . .

She frowned. Then she rose from her big chair with an air of decision. She was in a bad way, she

told herself, when she began to criticize her few friends, those loyal and devoted friends who had taken her up so whole-heartedly while the rest of the town held aloof. She would put on her hat and coat and take a brisk walk in the snow, to drive away her vapors. Incidentally, she would call on Norma Davis. Why should n't she? There had been no open break. Her sole knowledge that there was to be a break had come from Orson Hatch's maunderings, and possibly he was mistaken. At least she would know definitely how it was to be. The truth was that she could not endure any longer the suspense of not being sure. It was after four o'clock. She would walk half an hour and drop in on Norma at tea-time. And she would hold her head very high when she saw Norma, and not let fall the slightest hint that she suspected anything was wrong between them.

But when she rang the Davis bell and asked for her friend it was hard to hold her head high under the startled half-frightened look of the maid who came to the door. It was clear the girl knew something—that she had overheard, perhaps, a few remarks dropped by Norma or Judge Davis. She actually gulped in her embarrassment over Dorinda's simple inquiry as to whether Miss Davis was at home.

"I'll go right in, Margaret," Dorinda said coolly, and passed her with the head high; but it had been an achievement to keep it high. It was a further achievement to be gay and natural with Norma, who for an

instant after her entrance to the living-room was as overcome as Margaret had been. Then Norma pulled herself together and the two girls sat down in a room so like Norma that the visitor almost expected it to look flustered, too. The little matter of filling a cup and passing toast helped to bridge the next awkward moments. But suddenly Dorinda realized that she could no longer ignore the tension between them and she spoke under the pressure of the knowledge.

"Norma, what's the matter? Why haven't you been to see me?"

"Oh, Dorinda!"

Norma put down her cup and looked at the caller, her gray eyes full of tears. She was a nun-like girl, of more force of character than she revealed to casual acquaintances, and her father's recent ultimatum was one of the tragedies of her quiet life. She felt for Dorinda the deep-seated admiring devotion often given by plain girls to their more dazzling associates; but Dorinda had shocked her sorely of late, and though she wept over her father's decision she had come to feel that it was just. In Dorinda's presence, however, she found herself weakening—as one weakens over a loved child one is trying to discipline for its good.

"I'm going to be perfectly frank with you," she faltered. "There could n't be anything but frankness between us, could there? But . . . it's so hard!"

"I understand. There's a whipping coming, and it

hurts you more than it hurts me," Dorinda commented. "All right, go ahead with it."

Norma ignored the flippancy. It was part of her strength that she could usually ignore anything she did not like.

"I think you do understand, really. It's Father," she explained. "He's heard things he does n't like—about your friends and your parties," she hurried on. "You know how conservative he is. He has all the old-fashioned ideas. And he takes his responsibilities toward me so seriously because Mother is gone. Ever since she died he has felt that he had to be both father and mother to me; he's simply obsessed by the idea. I suppose it's because I'm all he has. But he says he would rather see me dead than acting the way so many girls act now . . ."

She stopped, realizing that she was on thin ice, and Dorinda approached her cautiously across that ice.

"Your father thinks I'm a menace," she interpreted, without resentment. "Well, perhaps I am. But I'd never have hurt you. You know that, don't you?"

"Of course I know it." Norma took out her handkerchief and shed into it the facile tears of the Normas of the world. "I have told him so. We've talked about it by the hour. He's always ready to listen to my side of things, and sometimes he gives in. But this time . . . since last night . . ."

"This time he won't?"

Norma's wet eyes dropped away from her friend's.

"No," she said. "And yet . . . I think I was bringing him around. Then, this morning he heard about last night's party, and he said things at lunch to-day that showed me it's hopeless. Oh, *why* did you do it? Father thinks something awful is going to happen to you. He says you can't escape it in that dreadful set you travel with; and he's determined not to have me mixed up in it."

Dorinda nodded and rose.

"That's that," she agreed. "Just the same, I'm glad I came. I wanted it settled, one way or the other."

"So did I. I've been whipping up my courage all day, trying to go and tell you. It was harder because I was so hopeful till last night . . . Oh, Dorinda," she repeated, "why do you go on this way? Is it worth while?"

Dorinda winced. That everlasting question! How many times she had heard it in the last six months!

"It seems worth while to me," she steadily assured her friend. "It seems most awfully worth while to me to live my life in my own way and not in other people's way. That's all it amounts to. I want to live just as different a life as I possibly can from the life I've lived up till this year, and from the life most people are living still. I want to get away from everything my pious hypocrite of a father stood for. He was always preaching like a saint outside the house and acting like a devil at home; of course every one saw

through him, but he kept right on. I hope he 's seeing me now. I 'd like to think he was."

"Dorinda! How can you talk like that?" Norma, who had remained in her chair, hoping the caller would change her mind and sit down again, rose with the words as if the other's remark had been a physical force impelling her.

Dorinda made a weary gesture.

"I 'm answering your question. I 'm sick of having standards preached. If I had to live the way most people in this town live, I 'd go mad. You see," she went on more quietly, "you 're really the only conservative person I care for ; and oh," she broke out fiercely, "the hours and days and weeks of utter boredom I 'd have to endure from others in order to hold you!"

Norma shrugged thin and helpless shoulders.

"There it is, then."

"Yes, there it is."

For a moment they stood looking at each other, both young faces full of genuine feeling. Then Norma caught her friend's hand and swung her back into a chair.

"I 'm not going to let you go this way!" she cried. "If I did I 'd have it on my soul all my life. Let 's talk things over sensibly. Let 's find some way to keep together. There must be one. Why don't you compromise? One can have an awfully good time, if that 's what you want, without defying peoples' ideas



the way you do. If you had a well-known, conservative chaperon—”

“Ugh! that chaperon again!” But Dorinda settled deeper in the chair and threw back her coat, glad to prolong this last encounter. “The chaperon always comes up sooner or later, in every talk I have. But I won’t have a chaperon, and that’s settled. How much liberty would I have with a chaperon around the place? It would be a joke!”

“I suppose it all comes back to what your idea of liberty is.” Norma looked at her thoughtfully. “What is it, anyway? I’ve often wondered.”

“It’s simple enough,” Dorinda told her. “It’s merely doing what I please, any time or any place I please to do it.”

“Yes, of course; I know that. But just what is it you please to do? I’m not asking from curiosity, you know. I’m merely trying to help you—and hold on to you.”

“I know.” Dorinda bent forward and touched Norma’s hand, resting on the broad arm of the big easy-chair in which her hostess sat. Norma looked so comfortable sitting there—so settled, so assured. For just a moment insight was given the guest to realize what this other girl stood for, and she herself had the lonely feeling of a homeless child watching through a window another child’s home life. “That’s why I’m answering the same questions I’ve answered so often lately. For I *have* tried to make people understand; I really

have. But they never can, someway. Probably it's because the Grandon people never knew me and never wanted to. They don't really want to, now. They despised Father, and they have n't any faith in his daughter. I suppose they'd crook a finger at me sooner or later, when they got ready to. They would think it was their duty. But they've waited too long. I don't need them now."

"Try again—to explain, I mean," Norma urged, ignoring the latter part of this outburst.

"I want to come and go as I please, without having to consult any human being about my plans or movements. I want to select my own friends, wherever I find them, without any thought of position, or any of that rot. I want to entertain them when and where I please, and in any way I please, in my own home or elsewhere. That is n't a very terrible program, is it? It's what any normal human being wants, is n't it, if one comes down to brass tacks?"

"In one way it is. But you see, Dorinda—don't go off the handle, will you?—the point is that you've selected such awful friends. Surely you don't like drunkenness and vulgarity . . . and yet . . ."

Dorinda reflected.

"I suppose it is hard for people to understand," she said at last, "that I don't like Kitty and Chad and Jim because they drink. I like them in spite of their drinking. They all have some wonderful qualities, and I shut my eyes to the drinking just as one shuts

them to other faults in other friends. I think I see all three of them as they are. Chad has the sweetest nature I've ever known, though he looks like a faun and is one at heart. He's gay, generous, sympathetic, understanding, and though perhaps you won't believe it, he's clean-minded. He's also weak and irresponsible and lazy, and he loves a good time and he drinks too much. I'm hoping he'll get over his worst faults."

"He won't, if you let him fill himself up at your house all day and all night," Norma pointed out with sudden austerity.

"That was a nasty one, but I deserve it," Dorinda admitted. "It's a problem. He knows Father had a 'cellar,' and if there is n't what he wants on the table or sideboard, he goes down and helps himself. Of course I've got to do something about it; I was really ashamed of him to-day. Then there's Kitty," she went on hurriedly. "She's a genius,—every one admits that,—and her music means everything to me. It's very rarely that Kitty loses her head as she did last night and this morning. She has other faults, too, I suppose, but I shut my eyes to them, just as they all shut their eyes to my ignorance and arrogance and bitterness. I can't imagine life without them, now that I've found them, and I have a persistent feeling of having known them since the beginning of things. Sometimes I even have an uncanny belief that we all played together in Greek groves, thousands of years ago.

Things they say and do have seemed so familiar from the first."

She laughed a little, as if in apology for these imaginings, but Norma remained serious, watching her with grave eyes. Norma's mind was rather like a garden—a space with a pleasant background, in and out of which agreeable persons decorously wandered. It now disturbed her to have these aliens in it, but as they were there she tried to be hospitable.

"I'm not making out a very good case for them or for myself," Dorinda added drearily, "and I suppose you won't believe me if I tell you, though it sounds idiotic, that I believe I can help those three. Now laugh!"

Norma did not laugh. Instead she asked another question, invited another alien.

"How about Jim Bryant?"

"Jim has n't the fine nature of the other two. There's a queer streak in him. But he has more brains than all the rest of us put together. He went through Harvard and took a post-graduate course in literature in France, and now he's trying to write, or says he is. He has been an education to me. He is as many-sided as Huneker or George Moore—knows art, music, literature, keeps up with the new movements in them all, though I don't know how he does it. His ideas of life are pretty sickening, and he talks as if he had the morals of a cat; but I think it's principally talk with

him. Anyway, one does n't have to pay attention to that, and he 's just as apt to talk of something beautiful as he is of something nasty. There 's a certain excitement," Dorinda added simply, "in never knowing which it 's going to be."

"I suppose you won't like my saying this," Norma began timidly, "but you know every one is talking about Miss Perkins's club, the Black Butterflies, and about your joining it . . ."

Her friend shrugged.

"I have n't been there very often—only two or three times. I admit there are some poisonous creatures in it. But the club is n't large. There are only about a dozen members, and I rather think Kitty 's getting tired of them."

"But . . . were n't the Black Butterflies at your party last night?"

"Yes, most of them—more 's the pity."

Norma leaned forward and caught her hands.

"Then *you* are getting tired of them, too!"

"Of them, yes. Not of Kitty and Chad and Jim. I can never give up those three. Kitty's music and Jim's talk, and even Chad's, have spoiled me for any one else. Their slogan is Beauty First, you know, and, though you 'll never believe it, they have given me little journeys among the stars many a time. Kitty's music alone— But what 's the use of talking?"

"I know Miss Perkins is a wonderful musician,"

Norma murmured, trying to understand. "But . . . is n't she rather unbalanced?"

"She could have the world at her feet if she wanted it there. But she won't play for money, and she won't play for any one but herself and her friends. That's her creed and she lives up to it. I know it does seem unbalanced to those who don't know that there really is such a thing as art for art's sake."

"Has n't she other queer ideas?" Norma ventured. "Free love and all that?"

"Yes, she has other queer ideas. For example, you will almost never hear her or Chad or Jim using slang. They think it's ugly; and so it is. When I listen to the slang others use, and that slips off my own tongue . . ."

Dorinda had deliberately ignored the free-love issue, and Norma followed her lead.

"But their drinking! Do they think that's beautiful?"

"They go back to the Greeks and Romans on that issue. *They* didn't think—"

Norma broke in hastily. The Greeks and Romans were too remote from the moment to appeal to her.

"Then there's only one other thing to do," she sighed. "Can't you make friends with some of the best of the other set, a lot of them, and combine the two groups?"

"They wouldn't combine."



"Have you tried it?"

"You know I have, in a limited way. How could I really try it, when I know so few people? But you know how it worked with you, for instance."

"Yes." Norma was baffled, and showed it.

Dorinda rose to go, and this time Norma accepted the action as meaning departure. They faced each other uncertainly.

"If only you would marry!" Norma brought out. "That would give you control of your money, and solve the whole problem, and satisfy everybody. A young married woman can be as gay and unconventional as she likes, in reason!"

Dorinda laughed and kissed her. "Thank you for that, dear," she said. "It's the usual valedictory, and it shows the discussion is ended. Good-by—and good luck."

Norma went with her into the hall.

"Let's keep on thinking," she begged, "and see if we can't find a way." But she spoke without hope, and the bang of the big front door as Dorinda descended the steps had the eloquence of an eternal farewell.

Dorinda walked home slowly through the falling snow. Already the streets and roofs and trees were mantle-wrapped and the aspect of the old town's best residence suburb was that of a master etching, but she saw none of its beauty. A black depression enveloped her. When she reached her house it faced her with brightly smiling eyes. Some of the Butter-

flies had come, the illumination meant, and were making themselves at home, as was their comfortable habit. Well, let them continue to do so. She was in no mood to see any one. She walked on aimlessly, sternly looking herself in the face. "Keep on thinking," Norma had advised, and Dorinda was obeying the injunction. But she obeyed without volition. A force stronger than her will shaped and directed her mental processes; with surprising clearness she saw herself as she seemed to others. She had just about done for Dorinda Maxwell, with that wretched party last night. She realized its effect on Orson Hatch, and could forecast the action he would take. She must anticipate that action if she could. But how? The talk of getting out, of giving up her inheritance, of living like a sparrow, as her newly chosen companions lived, was all nonsense, of course, and Mr. Hatch when he thought it over was clever enough to know it was nonsense. Moreover, despite her black memories, Dorinda loved her home and was proud of it. She must think . . . find some way. She tramped on, head down, hands deep in the side pockets of her fur coat, kicking the snow before her like a child. Vaguely at first, and then more clearly, a plan took shape in her mind. . . .

That evening about eight o'clock, Goddard, having somewhat reluctantly settled down to the reading of law in the dimly lighted "third floor back," which was his

home, was disturbed by a sharp rap at his door. The voice of Maggie, maid of all work in Mrs. Kemp's boarding-house, voiced its sense of injury from the hall.

"There's a party on the 'phone, Mr. Goddard," it remotely informed him. "An' I called an' called you from the foot of the stairs, but you would n't hear. The party says it's urgent."

Goddard apologized and volplaned to the lower hall. He was already annoyed by the "party," whoever it might prove to be. It might be as hard to get back to work after the interruption as it had been to get down to it at the start. Moreover, a journey up and down two long flights of stairs was hard on Maggie, who, he lightly estimated, had already made it several hundred times that day. He seized the dangling mouth-piece and barked into it:

"Goddard speaking."

"Oh, Mr. Goddard!" He frowned. The staccato voice was Dorinda Maxwell's, and the sound of it laid no balm on his troubled spirit.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you, but I want to consult you about something very important. Could you come over to my house now? It's entirely a personal matter," she hurriedly went on, as he did not speak, "and it won't take much of your time."

Goddard grinned into the dimness of the hall. She was making it clear that there were no guests to be taken home this time. Nevertheless he hesitated, tell-

ing himself that he was "fed up" with the girl and her affairs.

"Please come," she added; "it's really urgent."

"Oh, well; all right. I'll be there in half an hour," he rather ungraciously told her; and replaced the receiver on its hook without listening to her eager acknowledgment.

He was glad to find her alone when he reached the house, and waiting for him in the room he had admired earlier in the day. He had taken the car ride and the subsequent tramp resentfully, telling himself that he was on some wild-goose chase; but in the Maxwell hall he gave his hat and coat to Annie and, entering the library, approached the fire and his hostess with an emotion stronger than mere resignation. It was worth coming through the storm to have another half-hour in this library; and again he told himself that the room was a nice setting for the girl. She was in full evening dress, which he felt to be a touch of swank. He was glad he was wearing a dark business suit, and he settled his heavy walking-shoes on the fender with defiant firmness. She could n't move him with her splendor, he reflected, though she was as radiant as a Christmas-tree. She was wearing a silver thing, with shining beads on it. That was as far as his analysis went, but his strikingly blue eyes lingered on the gown and on her face.

She was a little thing, and he preferred small women. Sitting, as she was, almost lost in her luxurious chair,

she gave an impression of helplessness which he admired even while he realized that it was misleading. This young person helpless! She was a match for him and for a dozen like him. He recalled the cool effectiveness with which she had pressed him into an unpleasant service earlier in the day. Her up-bringing had made her as hard as nails, and she probably had a will as unyielding as old Maxwell's, whose stubbornness had been a byword in his community.

Having brought him there, the girl seemed in no haste to tell him why she had done so. Quietly, out of the corner of an eye, she was taking him in, appraising him anew in the light of the idea that had led her to summon him. He was a big young man, and there was no question that he was good-looking—though a bit too serious. Probably that was what made his unexpectedly boyish smile so attractive. She approved of his black hair with the wave in it, of his unusual eyes, of his clear-skinned, smooth-shaven brown face, and his strong well-shaped hands. She approved the unselfconsciousness which made him ignore the contrast between his heavy shoes and her satin slippers, now side by side on the fender. Most of all, she approved of his suggestion of poise and quiet strength.

"It was awfully good of you to come," she brought out at last.

"Between you and me, I think it was," he cheerfully agreed.

"I hope I did n't interfere with an engagement."

"Oh no; I don't go out much. I was studying."

David did n't care how long she kept this up. The comfort of the room was enveloping him like a wadded garment. He fixed his eyes on the fire and blinked at it almost drowsily. He was recalled from his sense of well-being by the girl's voice. There was a quality in it which made him stiffen into close attention.

"Mr. Goddard," she began, "I've been thinking a lot since I saw you this afternoon."

"Thinking is an exercise that has been warmly commended," he reminded her.

"I suppose you fancy I'm not up to it," she interpreted. "You'll change your mind before I'm through."

"Changing my mind is one of the best things I do." He was beginning to be interested. Her seriousness seemed genuine.

"I have been realizing, among other things," she continued soberly, "that I've given myself a frightfully black eye by that party last night."

As he took this in silence, she hurried on.

"The town's talking its head off. I've lost my best friend, Norma Davis. My waitress, Annie, has just given me 'notice' because she does n't approve of the guests I have. And I rather think Mr. Hatch is working himself up to taking a firm stand with me. He'll probably make a big cut in my income."

"It does sound rather serious, for one day's record," he admitted, feeling uncomfortable.



"So something has to be done," she briskly ended, "and I've decided what it ought to be."

"Good!" he acclaimed, wondering what all this was leading up to.

"The thing every one has suggested is a chaperon," she explained. "I won't have a chaperon, so that's settled. I won't have one because I'm not going to be cheated out of living my life my own way. But what I've got to do is to throw some sort of sop to convention—something that will look well and muzzle the critics and at the same time leave me as free as I am now."

"That will take some doing," he gravely pointed out.

"That's what I thought, at first, but now I see there's a very simple way to do it. Next to clamoring for the chaperon, my advisers have clamored that I ought to marry. Well, I need n't go into them, but there are reasons why I loathe the very thought of marriage. Perhaps you can guess what some of them are. You can, if you ever met my father," she bitterly interjected. "If you can't, it does n't matter. All that matters is that for me marriage is out of the question. But since it would soothe my neighbors and give me a better standing, I would n't object to an apparent marriage which would be a matter of form—a marriage put on a strictly business basis. That's where you come in," she ended simply.

The young man stared at her.

"You mean you want me to advise you about the legal end of such an experiment?"

She looked patient.

"No. I don't mean anything of the sort. I mean that, purely as a business proposition, I want you to go through the form of a marriage ceremony with me. I want the protection of your name and your reputation and your presence, and I'm ready to pay well for them."

A sudden and quite amazing smile flashed at him through her seriousness.

"You're the logical person, you know," she pointed out. "You're the town's model young man. I could n't have found a better candidate if I'd searched for years!"

There was a long moment of silence. Goddard told himself that what he had just heard proved what the gang she trained with had done to the poor girl. In six months the Black Butterflies had so hardened, so calloused her, that she could sit there and make such a suggestion. He could not look at her, but some reply was necessary and he addressed the whispering fire.

"This," he informed it, "is the most amazing thing I've ever listened to in my life; and of course," he firmly added, "I'm not really hearing it. Or if I am, it's a joke."

"Oh, you're hearing it," his hostess calmly assured him. "I'm offering you a job, Mr. Goddard. It's

as definite a one as the job of private secretary would be and I 'm talking about it without embarrassment because it 's a straight business matter. Why should I make any maidenly gestures? They 're out of date, anyway, in sophisticated circles. Besides, I 'm not the least little bit in love with you; that ought to be clear. And it 's just as clear that you 're not in love with me. So why should n't we talk frankly and without blushes? I will give you five thousand a year to marry me and pose as my husband before the world. You will live in this house and supposedly be the master of it, but you will leave me and the house exactly as independent as we are now."

He shook his head. Incredibly, the girl meant what she was saying! He smiled at her and his self-possession, which had been on the point of flight, returned to him. After all, the creature was only twenty-two.

"You think you've been thinking," he kindly assured her, "but of course you have n't. You 'll have to think more, and of something a lot better."

She gave him a long, thoughtful look.

"You mean that you won't do it!"

"Of course I won't do it!"

"Why not?"

"Because . . . because . . . Oh, Great Scott! . . . for a million reasons," he said, almost irritably.

"Tell me some of them."

"The whole idea is crazy. But if you insist on

reasons, I can give you plenty. For one, I shall want a wife myself some day . . . a real one . . . and a home and children."

"I thought of that, of course," she conceded. "It's the big obstacle. But I was sure you were n't especially interested in anybody, or I'd have heard of it. How old are you?"

"Twenty-four."

"When will you be admitted to the bar?"

"Next spring, I hope."

"Well, you probably won't be in a position to support a wife for several years, will you?"

"Probably not," he admitted, rather tartly. If she wanted to go on talking, there seemed no reason why she should not be allowed to do so. And this experience was unique. He would never have another like it, so he might as well learn what he could.

"Then put a time limit to our bargain," the amazing creature was saying. "Of course I'd rather not do that, but if you insist I will agree to let you get a divorce in five years . . . or ten years. I'd rather make it ten years. Every one says you are frightfully ambitious. Here's your chance. You'll only be thirty-four then. You will have earned fifty thousand dollars and saved a lot of it. You will be in a good position to marry—"

"Shall I?"

The young man rose, thrust his hands into his pockets, and stood with his back to the fire, looking

down at her. After all, there was a limit to the amount of this sort of thing one could stand.

"Miss Maxwell," he said seriously, "this is the wildest stuff I've ever listened to, but you seem to be in earnest, so I'm going to talk back and talk straight." He gave her the rest eye to eye. "What sort of girl would want me after ten years of the kind of life you would put me through?"

She did not even blush. Again he told himself that she was an incredible creature, hardened beyond words, without even a suggestion that she had ever been other than hard. No modesty, no delicacy, no bloom. All right, then. Let her have what was coming to her for dragging him here to listen to her nonsense.

"You imagine that I could help you," he went on. "Of course I could n't do anything of the sort. I'd simply be a figurehead. But you could drag me down, and you would do it. You say I'm ambitious. I admit it. The 'chance' you talk about would wreck me. In a year I'd be the laughing-stock of this town. Could I be of any use, then, to you or myself, or any one else? You'd have made a bad bargain, and you would regret it. And, aside from everything else, you know, and in spite of what you say, there's always a chance that some day you will want to marry."

"It's your side of this we're talking about," she dryly reminded him. "It is n't my side. I have thought mine out. It's just as Norma said. There's

got to be something done, and a marriage of form seems the only thing."

He caught at the name as a traveler rushes to the shelter of a tree in a storm.

"Norma! Good Lord! are you telling me that she stands for this crazy scheme!"

"No, of course not; that is, she does n't know anything about it. But she did suggest this afternoon that I ought to get married, and I thought out these details after I left her. I suppose I did n't think of your side of it enough; I was so busy thinking about my own. You see, as a married woman I should n't be fussed over half so much."

"I'm afraid you are wrong about that. This community is small, but it's like any other community. It will 'fuss,' as you call it, over any woman who upsets its traditions."

"But if her husband stands for what she does—"

"He would n't. Do you suppose a decent man wants his wife a scandal to the place, and his name dragged down—?"

"Wait. Wait!" she begged. He looked uncomfortable.

"I beg your pardon," he muttered. "I was just thinking what a devilish position a man would be in—"

"Suppose you think a little more of the other side of it," she suggested. "I'd better explain first that I have no idea of dragging your name down, or my own,



either. It's to improve matters, not to make them worse, that I would do this thing."

He gave her a sudden straight look. If a debate was in order he would indulge her to that extent.

"Do you mean that you would turn over a new leaf?" he asked.

"In a way, yes. And marrying you would make the community think it's a bigger leaf than it is. Of course," she added wearily, "people here would never let me live down the last few months if I tried to do it alone. And they will talk themselves black in the face about Norma's throwing me over. They will think that means much more than it does."

"Just what would the new leaf mean?" he persisted.

"I want to be free, but I don't want to be indecent. That's not my idea of liberty. I'm not going to have lovers, if that's what you're afraid of, or to drink as my friends do. That sort of thing does n't appeal to me any more than marriage does. It never has and never would. But I don't intend to be strictly conventional, either, and I do intend to be my own mistress. I shall try to make some new friends, but I will certainly keep my old friends. All I'll ask of you will be to sit at the head of the table, to be seen often in public with me, to be on hand for occasional dinners and parties—only for some of them, mind you, not for all of them. You will have your own suite of rooms on the second floor. You can come and go as you choose. You can go on with your law studies and into your

practice as soon as you're ready. You can have this library, which you seem to admire, to read and work in whenever you want to use it. You would get a salary of five thousand a year, paid quarterly in advance. And in ten years, say, or even five, if you insist, you will be rid of me. The point is, I've simply got to do something, and I've got to do it quick. But it's your big chance as well as mine. Can't you see that?" she broke off to ask.

"No."

"Well, in a few years this will put you where it might take you a lifetime to get alone."

"But what could I do?" he asked, to lead her on.

"I've told you that. Mr Hatch and Judge Davis think I'm in deadly danger. I want you to act as a social dike and in general as a sort of . . . of guard."

"A shepherd dog?" he grimly suggested.

"Yes, if you care to put it that way."

"Your figures are rather mixed. But what would I do if I saw the waves or the wolves coming?" he smiled.

"I'd have no authority to act."

"No . . . but you could bark and warn me. What are you hesitating about?" she ended brusquely.

"Can't you realize that it's just a job I'm offering you, and that I'm not going to wreck your life?"

He passed a palm over his shining black hair—a characteristic gesture of his in moments of deep thought, as she was to learn—and stared at her through a fog in which there began to twinkle distant lights of under-

standing. Looked at as a proposition to be considered by himself, the thing, of course, did n't bear thinking about. But he was beginning to realize how carefully this girl had thought it out and that, as an abstract proposition to some one else, it might conceivably work. She had put it very clearly, too, and her manner, the too-sophisticated manner he had mentally objected to a little earlier, was of course the only possible one for such a discussion. He remembered hearing Hatch say that she had inherited old Maxwell's brains and that she alternated between a sudden and startling use of them and a maddening childishness. This, Goddard began to suspect, was one of the occasions on which she was using them. Put as she had put it, her scheme was n't so wild, after all—for some one else! And what an adventure it would be—for another fellow! He approached her guardedly through the clearing mist.

"I begin to see that your plan might possibly appeal to some one else," he admitted.

"I 'm not suggesting it to some one else. Are you in love with any one?" she shot at him.

"No."

"Some one told me you had no family living. Is that true?"

"Yes. My father and mother died when I was a boy. I was brought up by an aunt who died three years ago. My father," he added, "was the station agent in Chester. My mother was a public-school teacher in Chester before she married him."

If these details interested her, she showed no sign of it.

"Good. Then there's no one you would need to consider in this matter?"

"No one but you and myself," he agreed with an irrepressible smile at her persistence.

She was sure she had him now, so she proceeded with what she considered the ultimate arguments.

"Do you like comfort and luxury and easy living?" she asked, looking up at him as he now stood with his elbow on the mantel, staring down at her.

"I suppose so. I've never had a chance to try them out."

"Do you object to doing another person a good turn if the opportunity comes your way?"

"Not violently."

"Then why not take the engagement? Think of it as a ten-year contract."

He took his arm from the mantel and straightened. It was about time the episode came to an end.

"I can't do it, Miss Maxwell," he began seriously, and then broke out, "Great Scott! what sort of fellow do you take me for?"

"It's my only chance," she urged. "Can't you see that? You know what will happen if I go on as I'm going?"

He could not make the obvious retort that this was not up to him. He stood before her in silence, eager now to end the interview and get away from the house.

Once safely out of it, he told himself, he would see that it was a long time before he crossed this young person's path again.

"It's the opportunity of your life I'm offering you," she coolly repeated. "Do try to realize that. With ten years' experience and fifty thousand dollars you can go as far as you like."

He threw back his shoulders with a quick breath.

"I know all this is a compliment," he told her, "that you should choose me, I mean, and not some one else—"

"There is n't any one else."

He smiled.

"Well, that takes something off the compliment. What I was trying to say is that I appreciate the compliment, Miss Maxwell, but what you suggest is out of the question. I can't do it."

"You're sure you can't?"

"Perfectly sure."

"All right. Good night." She sank lower in her chair and spoke without looking at him. "It's my last chance," she confided to the listening room, "my very last chance."

He was almost at the door, but the words reached him.

"That's all nonsense," he said, turning and fairly snapping the words at her. "There are lots of men. . . . You will meet some one. . . ."

She smiled.

"It's my only chance, and you know it."

"Good God! even if it were, what's that to me! Why should I have to do anything? I've only spoken to you half a dozen times in my life!"

"But you know all about me, and I know all about you."

He turned and came back to her, drawn by a force he did not understand. Possibly it was the increasing lure of the great adventure to one who had never had an adventure. His blood was tingling. Never before had he felt so intensely alive. But he made the points his brain dictated.

"Miss Maxwell, can't you realize what you are asking?" he begged. "Why, if I did this thing I'd simply be a parasite!"

"You would work, and you would work hard. You would earn every cent I paid you."

"I don't see how. I'd be contemptible in my own eyes, and in the eyes of everybody else. I'd despise myself. My nature would rot under such a life. A form ceremony . . . a toothless watchdog! How in God's name can you imagine that any community would be impressed by such a marriage?"

"No one would know anything about that except ourselves," she pointed out. But her voice held no entreaty, for she believed now that the game was lost. "Every one else would think it was a real marriage and a happy one. Of course, if we could n't give people that impression, the experiment would be a fail-



ure. You would earn part of your salary by good acting."

For a few moments he stared past her into the fire, while the call of adventure grew louder. Talk about exploring unknown continents! What was that to such a leap in the dark as this?

"Have you worked out the details?" he asked, crisply.

"Of course I have."

"Let's hear them."

He had not known her face could flash into flame like that, and he watched the phenomenon with interest.

"Then you will consider it?"

"What you have just said may make a difference. I'll listen."

"It's got to be done in the right way," she repeated, realizing that this point had impressed him. "People must think it's the real thing. If they don't, there will be no sense in doing it at all. My plan is that you will come here several times a week for a few weeks, to dinner and dances, like any other friend—as if you were getting interested, you know. You must take me out, too. It is n't as if we were strangers, you know. We have known each other six months and every one in town knows that you brought me home the night of Norma's party. . . ." She shied away from the memory of that night. For some reason this was not the time to bring it in. "For all people know,

we might have seen each other often since," she went on hurriedly. "But from now on we must be seen together constantly."

"I understand," he grimly interpreted. "One of these whirlwind courtships we read about."

She nodded.

"The neighbors will watch it till their eyes stick out. At first they will think I am dragging you to perdition. Then they'll begin to see that we're going to the right things . . . concerts and oratorios . . ." She made a childish face at him. "They'll think we're in love. They will see a change in me, an uplift. They will realize that you're going to marry me and reform me!"

"If we're going to talk about the matter at all, let's be serious," he stiffly suggested.

"I have never been so serious in my life," she assured him, "and I never expect to be as serious again. For I warn you right now I'm not going to 'settle down' or any nonsense of that kind. I'm simply going to make a bid for complete independence and my own money and for a little different place in the community, and I'll reform just enough to hold them, and no more. That must be understood. I'll never give up Kitty and Chad and Jim. But the neighbors won't expect a radical change in me very soon. They will know you'll need time, and they'll be patient, I think, especially if Norma and Judge Davis stand by. Do you think they would?" she broke off to ask.

"Yes."

"I think so, too. You see," she hurried on, "one of my grudges against the world is that almost no one ever came near me except Norma. I suppose they did n't dare to, because of Father. It was Norma's party that cost my mother's life; I'll tell you about that some time. After Mother and Father died the neighbors could have come, but they did n't. They were shocked by the fact that I was dancing the night my mother died. Besides, I suppose the servants repeated some things I had said. I hated everybody, just then. But I will hold out an olive-branch after we're married, and if they will take it I'll try to stand a little of them."

"It begins to sound more promising," he admitted. "How about the rest of the details?"

"Oh, well, after the whirlwind courtship we can be married, very quietly, soon after the holidays."

"Thank God for the quiet wedding!" he ejaculated.

"We can even go off to Chester by ourselves, and be married without saying anything to anybody, if you prefer that."

"I prefer that," he briefly agreed.

"From then on," she resumed, "we'll simply settle into a comfortable routine. Of course we shall have to be careful about the servants—not to let them suspect. If they knew, the whole town would know. Meantime, I'll keep Annie on by hinting of coming changes. I don't want a stranger here. We will tell every one we have agreed to respect each other's independence,

that it's part of our program. So no one will expect you to dance attendance on me too much."

She *had* thought it all out!

"There's the matter of your property," he reminded her. "You must protect yourself. But you could do that by a pre-nuptial agreement, in which I should waive all rights."

She gurgled. She had a nice laugh, and a really wonderful smile. He began to suspect that many of the mannerisms he disliked were excrescences, newly acquired.

"Mr. Hatch can draw it up. We will tell him it's the only condition on which you consent to marry a rich girl."

He looked down at her. For some reason it was no longer easy to think clearly. Life itself was pounding at the closed door he had never opened to it. Life and adventure and ambition and . . . yes . . . sympathy, too, hammered at that closed door with hard, persistent fists. If he opened it to them, if he let them troop in and take possession, what would they do to him? He looked at the girl. Her eyes were on the fire, but she had an air of breathless waiting, as if she, too, heard those pounding fists. . . .

Words sounded now, among the clamor—the words of Kimball, a man he greatly admired:

"Learn to do quick thinking and make quick decisions," Kimball had once advised him. "It's better to be wrong sometimes than slow always."

Kimball had n't been thinking of a decision like this, a decision on which a man's whole future might rest. Still . . .

Goddard drew a deep breath.

"All right," he said with a straight look at her. "I'll do it."

She met the look with one which gave him a momentary glimpse of another and very different personality. It was as if for the first time she herself fully realized to what her plan committed her, and the look was so strange that he found himself blinking under it. Here was some one who would keep a man guessing. . . . For an instant an inner panic seized him—a reflection, perhaps, of hers—and he would have given all he had to recall his promise. Then, in the eyes that still steadily held his, he saw something that touched him.

"I'm trusting you a lot," she brought out, "though I have n't touched on that at all. But you understand, don't you?"

"Of course I understand, all of it," he said gently. "It's one of the things that make this scheme possible. Now that everything is settled," he ended in a different tone, "I'll say good night, and drop in to-morrow, if you want me."

That inner panic, he had discovered, still held him, and every instinct urged him to get away—not from his promise but from her and from her house. She seemed to understand; or perhaps she, too, wanted to be alone. But she was cooler now than he was.

"I don't know whether it interests you," she told him as she rose; "but there is n't any one else I could trust so much. That's why I said it was my last chance."

He held out his hand.

"I will do my best for you, kind employer. Now I'm off. If it's all the same to you, I'd rather not talk about the plan any more till my ideas have shaken down a little."

"But it's settled?" she said anxiously.

"Oh, yes, it's settled."

"Good night, then, and thank you."

She put her hand in his. Two minutes later she heard the front door snap shut as he left the house.



## CHAPTER IV

THE next day Dorinda admitted to her soul that her future husband was at least familiar with the first moves of the courting game, and the discovery was a relief. Before noon a box of chrysanthemums was brought to her by the appreciative Annie, with Mr. Goddard's card nestling among the gorgeous blossoms as if it belonged there. For Annie's attentive ears and avid eyes, Dorinda exclaimed about the flowers, and hung over them in what appeared to be a happy maiden revery. Also, she tore up a list of suggestions she had prepared for Goddard's guidance, and tried to fix her mind on higher things. The revery, however, persisted in dwelling on the practical detail that she must put the young man on salary at once and allow him an expense account as well. She realized that the income of a thirty-five- or forty-dollar-a-week clerk would not run to many boxes of chrysanthemums. Moreover, there would be the matter of downtown luncheons and dinners, theater and concert tickets, chocolates, and the like.

When she mentioned this later in the day, during his

call at tea-time, Goddard developed a streak of obstinacy.

"The income begins when the marriage begins," he said shortly, "and if you talk any more about expense accounts, I'll bolt. Great Scott! a man has to have some say about this game," he added, irritably—and immediately apologized. "But I mean it," he persisted, and she realized that he did.

The discovery both irritated and pleased her. Why should he swallow the camel of the whole proposition and strain at such a little gnat as an expense account? Besides, his attitude would handicap her. She could not demand half as much social attention from him, knowing that he would pay the bills. On the other hand, she now realized with surprise, he was the only person, except her mother, who had ever given her anything. The fact was incredible, but it was a fact, so the chrysanthemums gave her at least the thrill of a new experience. Her friendship with Norma was only six months old, and her own first gifts to others were to be offered this coming Christmas. The Butterflies never had a spare dime among them. From the beginning of their association with her, Chad and Jim and Kitty had freely "grafted from Dorry," to quote Chad's expression, dropping in for meals, using her sedan and roadster, filling their flasks and pockets from her side-board supplies, and doing it all with a frank ostentation which was its redeeming feature. In current vernacular,—which was not theirs,—they were not "put-

ting anything over." They were merely taking all they could get "while the getting was good," and Dorinda knew that if any of the trio had possessed anything to give it would have been given as freely as its possessor took.

She often wondered how the three leading Butterflies lived in those intervals, increasingly brief, when they were not at the Maxwell house. Bryant, she knew, earned a little by his writing. He could have earned much more if he had been willing to work, but it was clear that he shared Chad's objection to this form of exertion. Chad occasionally mentioned that an "Aunt Julia," living within a trolley ride of Grandon, had sent him a check. As for Kitty, she lived like a sparrow up under the eaves of a ramshackle building in the hinterlands of the suburbs. One walked through a flour-and-feed store to reach the narrow back steps that led to what she airily called her studio, but which was merely a long, narrow loft, heated by a Franklin stove standing close to the grand piano that was Kitty's one treasure. In this room, which also held a time-abused divan, Dorinda knew that Kitty Perkins dressed and ate and slept and worked at her music when she felt like it, and cooked when she had anything to cook. Dorinda had visited the place only once, in response to a casual invitation of Kitty's after their first meeting, when, as strangers, they had sat side by side at a concert and had fallen into talk. After that, Kitty had swept Do-

rinda into the Black Butterflies and what Miss Perkins called Life.

"You're not alive, and you never have been," Kitty put it. "You're deader than your father and mother, poor dear, though you don't know it. However, I can see you stirring in your coffin, so sit up and let us show you some of the wonders of the living world."

It was the wonder of Kitty's music that Kitty showed her first, and the wonders of Kitty's music never failed with any one. During this visit to the studio, Chad Bailey, met for the first time that day, pointed that out.

"Away from her piano," he told the new-comer, "Kitty is just a red-haired girl with ugly spectacles and lovely hands and too many bones. At the piano, Kitty is Beethoven, Bach, Chopin, Liszt, Hoffman, Paderewski, and a dozen others in one, and she takes you up to the morning stars and lets you hear them singing together."

Dorinda admitted that this was true. Kitty made her forget the bare studio, and the sprawling figure of the faun-like Bailey lying full-length on the divan, and the scampering mouse back of the stove, and a dark, sardonic youth introduced as Bryant who sat cross-legged on the painted floor with the back of his head resting against Kitty's thigh as she played. . . .

Aside from Kitty's music, the studio's atmosphere was too depressing to encourage many visits, and it did not look at all like Kitty, who was always immaculate

and who, surprisingly, had an air, despite her shell-rimmed spectacles and her casual coiffures.

For one thing Dorinda was abysmally grateful. Not a member of the trio had ever asked her for money, either as a gift or as a loan. She would not have minded parting with the money, but she would have regretted the change of relationship such an episode must have established. So, apparently, would the other three. They had their code, and this was its first article. The subject of money was rarely mentioned by them, and then only in passing. Apparently they lived without it, and the cornerstone of the structure of their hectic friendship was Dorinda's realization that her hospitality, much as they now used and abused it, would not have held them if they had not liked herself. The moment she began to bore them they would fade away, graft or no graft, and would continue to foregather in Kitty's loft, as they had done before Dorinda met them. Indeed, it had not been as easy as the townsfolk imagined to lure them to the luxury and comfort of the Maxwell house. It was only when they discovered that its inmate was interested in their interests, and as lacking in social background as themselves, that they really accepted her.

All this she recalled as she listened to David's ultimatum. She had been warned by Mr. Hatch and others that the earnest purpose of most of the men and women who met her would be to part her from her money. Her financial independence was yet young; but so far,

at least, she had found these alarmists quite wrong.

"You can't afford to do everything yourself," she now pointed out to Goddard.

"I can't afford not to do it," he grimly maintained, and added, with the candor already established between them: "You must remember that I'm not planning to take you out more than once or twice a week. I sha'n't have the time, even if I had the money. You see, I'm at the office till five every day but Saturday, and I have to study at night."

"Twice a week will do, I think, if we go to places where we're sure of being seen by enough people," Dorinda agreed, with surprising humility. She had decided that she must sometimes give this masterful youth his head, at least in the initial stages of their experiment. Otherwise, as he himself had put it, he might "bolt." "If we go to the theater once a week, and to dinner or luncheon at Martin's every Saturday, it ought to do as a starter. But even that will cost you—"

"About fifteen dollars a week," he told her. "I have done a little estimating. Had to, you see. I've allowed five dollars a week more for flowers or candy, and I think I can get through on twenty a week, unless something unexpected comes up."

"It won't. We won't let it," Dorinda practically assured him. "Can you afford to spend twenty dollars a week?"

"That's the amount I've been saving," he explained.



"My salary is forty and my expenses are n't more than twenty. I won't save it now, that's all. There's another thing, too." For the first time she saw him blush, and the phenomenon was rather startling. "Clothes. I've got to get some new clothes. If it were n't for them I'd allow more for the weekly budget. But I want to do you credit. You always look so stunning."

"It's awfully sweet of you to think of that."

Dorinda looked at him with softened eyes. The greater part of her knowledge of life had come from books. She had read that most men were small boys at heart, and now she saw that this was true. The discovery that fiction occasionally follows life still amazed her. The young man before her was merely a self-conscious little boy, horribly afraid of being laughed at, yet robustly determined to play up in a strange new game.

"I know girls attach importance to such matters," he went on with more assurance, cheered by her commendation.

"It's vital, really."

"That's what I thought." The blush had faded and he went on confidently:

"Of course I have evening clothes; I bought some new ones this year, so they're all right. But I have only one good business suit, the one I've got on. I thought I'd get another, and some more things. I've been sailing pretty close to the wind, you see, trying to save all I could."

"Get a sport suit, if you can—knickers and golf stockings, and that sort of thing. A brown one would become you, one of those heather mixtures, and ties with some blue in them. I like the tie you have on to-day," she added kindly.

He grinned.

"Glad you do. I bought it this noon, for this call. All right," he added briskly. "That's understood. I suppose now we ought to get down to something that's really worth while."

"What?"

"I don't know."

For a moment they looked at each other blankly. Then, catching a sudden twinkle in his blue eyes, hers responded and they laughed together.

"That was nice," she said when the laugh ended. "How jolly it will be if we can like each other, and be friends. Do you think it's possible?" she ended almost timidly.

"You bet I do! If I did n't I would n't go into this contract. We're going to see a lot of each other, so we've simply got to like each other."

"It does n't follow, you know. We may get frightfully on each other's nerves."

"That's right, too." He looked at her thoughtfully. "There's still another chance we must take into consideration. Have you thought of it? We might, just possibly, fall in love!"

The moment the words left his lips he regretted them.

Her young face hardened, and her eyes looked at him with the coldness of green-gray glaciers.

"I suppose that simply had to come," she said icily, "so it's just as well to get it over and have an understanding. I'll make it as strong as I can. If you have any idea that I'm ever going to fall in love with you, get over it. And if you ever dare to fall in love with me, I'll hate and despise you, and I shall consider it an unpardonable breaking of an honorable contract. Is that clear?"

"Very, thank you." Goddard's face was blazing. In that moment he hated her. "I ought n't to have mentioned the subject," he brought out.

"I'm glad you did. As I said, it had to come up, so the sooner the better. But if you have any hopes—"

"Hopes! Great Cæsar's ghost! You *have* misunderstood me! I was suggesting the thing as a possible misfortune that might hit us. Do you think I want to fall in love with you? I can't imagine anything that would be worse! The only reason I went into this is that I felt sure there was n't a chance of it."

"So you were just warning me off?"

At his expression, she relented.

"Come down from your high horse," she said coolly. "Do you realize that we're almost quarreling? That simply won't do. It is n't for any such nonsense as this that we're making our experiment."

He drew a deep breath and his brilliant smile flashed out at her.

"I beg your pardon. Of course you're right. But I've got a devil of a temper."

"Does it often get the better of you?"

"No, I'm learning to control it."

"That's good. You see, I've got one myself, and I have n't learned to control mine."

She let this sink in for a moment before she spoke again.

"Go home and come back to dinner at seven."

"Shall I?"

"Yes. Some of the Butterflies will be here then, and we might as well give them their first jolt. It will be a jolt, for I fancy they won't like this—any of them," she added apprehensively. "But they will think they have a tremendous joke on me,—I've harangued so much against sentiment,—and that will comfort them. By the way,"—she turned a quick look on him,—“how about that acting I spoke of? Are you a good actor?"

"No, I was a rotten one in our dramatics at Chicago. I can put up a bluff, if that will do. But say, Miss Maxwell,—”again he was a small boy, this time a frightened one—“surely you don't expect me to start anything to-night, do you?"

She laughed.

"No. Of course we must n't rush things. The mere fact that you're here will make a strong enough impression for the first time."

"That's what I thought." His relief was so obvious that she laughed again.

"Of course you can register interest and admiration," she pointed out.

He nodded. "That will be easy."

"Have you any parlor tricks?"

"Not a trick!"

"H-m . . . that's disappointing." Her eyes brooded over him almost maternally. "But one can't expect too much," she cheerfully added. "Besides, it does n't really matter. There'll be only six at dinner—you and I, Chad, Jim, and Kitty, and . . . who's the sixth? . . . Oh, yes, Jack Normand telephoned that he wanted to come. Do you know him?"

Goddard nodded, an expression of distaste settling over his good-looking face.

"As well as I want to," he said. "He's about as perfect a specimen of a bounder as you can find, and there's hardly a decent house in town that will take him in any more."

"This one will, and it's still fairly decent. He plays the violin beautifully," Dorinda suavely went on. "And so far as the decent houses go, you know, I'd have trouble getting into most of them, myself."

David frowned. He hated to have her talk like that. Then he flushed again, for she was talking on:

"There's another thing you must remember. Nothing in our bargain allows you to criticize my other guests, or question who I have in my house. Please don't forget that again."

He bit his lips. He was furious. Her guests!

Her house! That's the way it was going to be from now on. A nice position he had put himself into! He met her eyes.

"All right," he said quietly, but with the sudden setting of the jaw she had noticed once or twice before. "But there's something I want you to remember. I'm not going to be snubbed, either before folks or when we're alone. And don't press too much on the 'my house' and 'my guests' after I get here. They'll supposedly be mine, too, whether I like it or not, and it is n't a part of my plan to be stepped on by you or your friends. That's straight talk."

She nodded.

"Two quarrels in half an hour is something of a record. Now go and get ready for the party," she added sardonically: "I can see that it's going to be a harmonious one!"

Then her fair-mindedness asserted itself.

"You are right," she admitted. "We've certainly got to treat each other prettily before other folks, so we might as well keep in practice when we're alone."

For Annie's benefit she went with him to the hall and chatted with him while he put on the overcoat the impressed maid hastened to offer. By way of underlining the situation, she even stood before a glass panel of the front door and watched him walk down the driveway. But when he had vanished from sight and she returned to the library, she took with her an unpleasant weight of foreboding.



What had she brought upon herself? Dispassionately she admitted that she knew little about Goddard, save that his reputation as a promising and popular young man was well established. He might have all sorts of unpleasant qualities not obvious to the eyes of casual friends. In a way she was putting herself into his power. He had insisted that her plan was a crazy one. He had agreed to it only when she had appealed to his cupidity and when she had guaranteed that the marriage would have the outward aspects of a real one, so that he would not suffer in the eyes of the community.

Probably she had made a blunder, a colossal one, far-reaching in its possibilities of trouble. If she had, she had, and that was all there was to it. Dorinda was no quitter. She sank deeper into the big chair where she had dropped, and tried to find reassurance in the memory of Goddard's self-conscious, small-boy face when he talked of his wardrobe. It was a comforting picture, and under its influence and that of the quiet of the room, she forgot her apprehensions in a doze.

## CHAPTER V

AS he dressed for dinner that night in the "third floor back," which suddenly began to seem such a safe refuge, Goddard was going through his own ordeal, considering his own position.

He was a man walled in by the unknown, and he surveyed himself with incredulous horror. He had gone into this thing, at the finish of his interview with Miss Maxwell, because she had deliberately played on his sympathies. But he was no hypocrite and no self-deceiver. He knew that he would not have gone in, even with those chords of sympathy vibrating as they had done, if his ambitions had not been served by the project, and his imagination fired by the adventure. He had remembered, too, the futility of Orson Hatch as a guardian. Hatch would sit up at times and take the girl to task, but Hatch was temperamentally incapable of any sustained effort in her behalf. And if some crisis in her life occurred while Hatch was eating his dinner, action on the crisis would have to wait. Goddard told himself he might have withstood the girl's appeal. He might have withstood the bribe and the adventure and the thought of Hatch. He had not been able to withstand all four, and now he was getting what

he deserved for being such a weakling. Very well, then, let him take it and not yowl. Which conclusion, by an interesting coincidence, was very like the one the lady in the case had reached two hours earlier.

He had especially dreaded the ordeal of dinner, yet when he was seated at the Maxwell table, at the right of his hostess and with Miss Perkins on his other side, he began to hope it might not be as serious as he had pictured it. Of course there were some bad moments. The first had come when his fellow-guests had given themselves a perceptible interval to recover from their stupefaction at seeing him among them. Indeed, the faun had professed himself unable to believe his eyes, and had repeatedly circled David, drawing the attention of the rest to the interesting points of resemblance between this pilgrim and the town's model young man, who, of course could not possibly appear in such low company. Also, during the dinner, Bailey had felt called upon to check several of Bryant's remarks with a reproachful, "Hush, Jimmie, Goddard is in our midst," and to follow this by an outburst of what he called "one-minute talks on edifying topics," such as the architecture of the new cathedral, the work of the Boy Scouts, and—this last a fine impassioned flight—the daily deed of kindness which a young man like Goddard undoubtedly felt himself bound to perform.

"To-day he has set out to elevate us," he announced. "And it is for us to see to it that he's as pure when I take him home to-night as he is now. Kitty, you've

got to help. Promise me that every time Jim opens his mouth you will put some food into it before he can speak."

It was all very foolish, but it was more or less amusing nonsense, and the pilgrim took it good-humoredly, realizing that there was no sting in Bailey's badinage. The food served was excellent—a detail which impressed him but to which his fellow-guests seemed indifferent. No one except himself and the hostess really ate anything. Much more strangely, none of them, save Jack Normand, drank too much. Chad abstracted David's wine-glasses with ostentatious care, and ordered milk and a lily for him; but Goddard retrieved a glass and drank some excellent claret, with an enjoyment only slightly blurred by Chad's subsequent careful study of him and his shocked insistence that the town's model young man was overcome by alcohol.

"Why do you people call yourselves *Black Butterflies*?" Goddard asked, to change the subject.

"Why Mohawk Indians?" Chad countered. Then he felt pity for this new-comer. "I suppose it's because we're as black as we're painted," he cheerfully ended.

With the suddenness characteristic of the Butterflies, Chad's mood changed.

"Say, Goddard, what the devil did you come here for, anyway?" he demanded.

"To see Miss Maxwell," Goddard admitted, and added that he did n't mind Bailey being there, too, if

he did n't make himself too much of a nuisance. Chad stared at him thoughtfully.

"Just the same, I'd like to know what really brought about this slumming expedition," he muttered.

No one, Goddard observed, paid any attention to Jack Normand. Apparently, like David, he did not belong. But, for that matter, no member of the odd trio paid any real attention to any one else at the table. At intervals the voice of each discoursed on some topic of individual interest, addressing the world at large. Such driftwood of talk as washed Goddard's way was usually unobjectionable, though he winced once or twice under some remark of Bryant's:

"I want rottenness when I want it," he heard Jim announce to the heedless table, "but I want to choose the time and the place myself. I don't want muck flung at me when I happen to be in a mood for something else. And I don't want it sandwiched between moral reflections and uplifting climaxes, either. I want things either gloriously indecent, from start to finish, without any cant about them, or I want them clean. It's the half-way attitude I can't endure."

Miss Perkins, who appeared to have been in a deep abstraction, came out of it at this point and languidly lifted an escaped tress of red hair from her shoulder, anchoring it temporarily with an insufficient hair-pin.

"Oh, who the devil cares what you want, Jim?" she inquired. "Or, rather, what you think you want. All

you really want is to have your muzzle left off, so you can talk twenty hours a day."

"I care," said Bryant, imperturbably. "So do you, really. That's one of the things I like about you, Kitty. You don't offer us dung-heaps with moral high-lights playing over them. When you really get going, you're good," he earnestly added, "for you're as bad as they make them."

"She is not to get going to-night, Jim," the hostess serenely mentioned, and Miss Perkins, who had straightened and opened her mouth, as if under the impression that she was, seemingly changed her mind. Goddard glanced at the quiet face of the waitress as she moved around the table, and wondered what a nice girl like Annie thought of the stuff she must often hear in this room.

"I know what you mean," Chad suddenly announced.

"If you do, it's the first time," Jim assured him.

"I always know what you mean," Chad told him with dignity. "That's what's the matter with me. Tha's why no one will have me around. Contaminated—tha's what I am." He was not drunk to-night, but merely getting a little thick of speech. "But if my mind was the chesh-pool yours is, Jim, I'd have it operated on." He came back to the sense of his responsibilities. "David mustn't hear you talk," he added firmly. "Very, very bad for him."

Bryant seemed to remember something.



"What's your notion of all this sex-obsession of to-day, Goddard?"

"I think there's entirely too much talk about it," the new-comer said.

"There's a little English book that gives a list of the remarks that begin and end conversations," Kitty murmured. "You need not read it, Mr. Goddard. You have ended this one."

"He has n't done anything of the sort," Bryant remarked, shortly. "What's the use of side-stepping the issue, Goddard? You know that every one's obsessed by sex just now, from the children in our kindergartens to tottering octogenarians."

"I don't know anything of the kind."

"Then I'm telling you," Bryant said patiently. "We've dragged the thing into the open, where it belongs, and where shrinking souls like you have got to recognize it, and get used to the sight of it, whether you want to or not. Is n't that better than to keep it in cellars and sewers—"

"And on mountaintops and aëroplanes and along the Milky Way," Chad muttered dreamily. "I hope this is going to be elevating, David," he earnestly added, "but I d' know."

Mr. Normand created a diversion, unpleasant in its way but welcome to the pilgrim in the party. This was, it appeared, the stage of a dinner at which Normand fancied himself a dog—a sleepy dog with a yearning for the fire. He babbled this information,

slipped from his chair, crawled over to the fireplace on his hands and knees, and lay down on the rug, where he sank into a deep slumber. No one but Annie paid any attention to this incident, and Annie merely revealed such observation of it as the practical details of her duties required. She skirted the rug with care and confined her table service as much as possible to that side of the dining-room which was farthest from the sleeper.

"He'll be all right in half an hour," Dorinda told Goddard. "He always does that, but it does n't last long."

"It can't last half an hour this time," Kitty said lazily. Kitty's note was indolence. "He's got to play for me. I feel moved to dance. We are not doing our duty by Mr. Goddard at all," she added with conviction. "I'm going to be Salome and give him Jack's head on a charger. Throw a pitcher of water on Mr. Normand, Annie."

As Annie did not follow the suggestion, Kitty herself threw a dinner roll, with an accuracy of aim which revealed some practice in the art. The roll hit Normand on the cheek and he moved and stirred.

"If you let 'm alone," Chad severely advised her, "he'll be all right. Let sleeping dogsh lie."

"He'll be all right now. Step on him, Annie," urged the exacting Miss Perkins.

Annie went about her routine, undisturbed. Evidently she was used to this sort of thing. But the last

suggestion had given Kitty an idea. Her haggard little face brightened.

"If we get him on the table," she eagerly added, "I believe I could do the dance up there without landing on his face. Perhaps I could n't, but I'd like to try."

The others received the suggestion with a resignation which deepened into interest as they perceived the possibilities of the experiment.

"Good idea!" Chad applauded. "An' if you do get a heel in 's eye, Kitty, it'll sherve 'm right. Ought to keep 's eysh open," he impressively added, "an shee wha' 's going on."

David looked at Dorinda. Would she permit this? It became clear that she would. What else could she do, she was asking herself. The Butterflies, having done so well in the beginning, were getting out of hand, as she might have known they would. The temptation to give a jolt to the town's model young man, undoubtedly present from the start, had become irresistible.

She directed Annie to remove the coffee-cups, lace centerpiece, and doilies, and with calm eyes she watched Chad and Jim lift to the table the lax figure of the guest on the rug. When he was being raised Normand blinked and drowsily protested, but finding himself promptly put down, he decided that all was well and drifted off again. Chad wheeled a phonograph from the next room and started it going, and Miss Perkins, mounting to the table with a clean jump of amazing agility, began her dance.

It was an interesting performance. Even Goddard, prejudiced though he was, had to admit that. Normand was a slight young man, but his body left only the sides of the round banquet board to dance on with any freedom, till Bryant, whose sporting spirit was now thoroughly aroused, dragged Normand's feet off the lower end of the table, thereby gaining for the dancer about six inches of space above his head. David shivered. Half a dozen times Miss Perkins's French heels almost came down on the sleeper's flushed face—almost, but not quite. At the end of the dance she landed lightly on his stomach, and the outraged youth shot up into a sitting position with a suddenness that nearly threw her to the floor. Chad caught her with one of his quick movements, and the rest applauded the dancer.

"Very good indeed, Kit." Bryant was nodding the approval Kitty seemed to expect, for she had fixed her eyes on him. "I did n't think you could do it. Now come and play for us. You must need a rest."

Miss Perkins, a little winded but evidently in a compliant mood, permitted him to lead her to the piano in the big drawing-room. And amazingly David, whose nightmare impression had been slowly deepening during the last hour, found himself transported to a music-flooded world in which normality and beauty dwelt as twins. He sank into the depths of an easy-chair and lent himself to Kitty's music, conscious now of the privilege of being among those for whom the eccentric

genius was willing to play. The Salome dance suggested Richard Strauss to the player, and she ran through part of the piano score of the opera, switching from that to Debussy's shimmering "Voiles" and De Falla's "Nights in a Garden of Spain," and then to Wagner, while her friends smoked and listened.

David looked around the circle of faces. Miss Maxwell and Bryant, who obviously loved music, were in a state of supreme content. Chad was sending a series of widening smoke rings toward the ceiling. Even Normand was sober now, and, at Kitty's request, eventually got his violin and played with her. At times the music stopped while one of the listeners called attention to certain phrases and demanded their repetition. Occasionally Jim and Kitty argued fiercely over the merits of old and new composers, while Normand kept up an extemporaneous accompaniment to the debate on his violin.

David's nightmare fell away and his heart lightened. It seemed incredible that the inspired artiste at the piano was the same girl who an hour before had been doing that Bacchanalian dance at such reckless risk to a fellow-guest. He was so grateful for Kitty's music that his voice shook when he thanked her.

Kitty, now merely a bony girl with two wisps of red hair in her eyes, nodded comprehendingly. She was used to having music-lovers act like that when she had played for them. But she had given Goddard something more than music—something for which, simply

and sincerely, he thanked his gods when he found himself alone again in the third floor back. She had shown him that, after all, there was more than weakness and rottenness in the Butterflies. She had helped him to understand Dorinda. He saw now why their hostess tolerated the faults of those friends for the sake of the qualities and gifts she admired. Best of all, Kitty had restored his courage. He could go on, into a future vague enough at best but without the menacing shapes he had seen there a few hours before.

Somewhere a clock struck one. He must stop thinking and try to go to sleep. But Kitty's playing seemed to fill the little room. He was lapped around by the Fire Music, by Sieglinde's love-song, by the stirring notes of the sword motive. Blinking into the darkness, he told himself that possibly he, too, had been shown his sword.



## CHAPTER VI

ON the occasion of their next meeting, which happened to be three days later, Dorinda mentioned to Goddard that he had made a favorable impression on her friends.

"The Black Butterflies liked you," was the way she put it. "They did n't expect to, and they did n't want to, but they did. And they're all sports enough to admit it."

She seemed to attach importance to this tribute, which its recipient was inclined to take lightly. His inner feeling was now an abysmal indifference to the opinions of the Butterflies, combined with a growing fear that their continued existence in Dorinda's circle would prevent any real upbuilding of her life. The memory of Kitty's music was fading. The memory of Kitty's dancing remained, with fragments of Bryant's talk and the picture of Normand's figure sprawling on the table. His dislike of these memories and pictures showed him that he himself was much more conservative at heart than he had ever realized. There was nothing of the Bohemian about him. He wanted decency and sobriety and the respect of his fellows and the peace of an ordered life. He had not realized how

much he wanted these things, until he saw them threatened. What would this girl do with him before she got through?

If they had loved each other, he believed they could have worked out together some constructive and successful plan of life, though he admitted that an emotional element entering in might possibly complicate the situation instead of helping to untangle it. As it was, that matter filled his mind. Thinking of the recent manœuver of Fate, he gloomily told himself, was his favorite indoor sport, though it brought him to no conclusion and merely intensified his gloom.

For two days he deliberately kept out of touch with Miss Maxwell,—he still thought of her as Miss Maxwell,—telling himself that a vacation was due him. Besides, she had said something about meeting at first only two or three times a week. If she wanted him she could let him know. But she made no sign. Probably she, too, was enjoying the vacation.

On the second day he sent her a big box of chocolates and let it go at that. The morning of the third day, which was Saturday, he telephoned, asking her to dine with him that night and go to the theater. She accepted without enthusiasm, there being no one else within hearing of the conversation; but she also invited him to luncheon, mentioning that she was driving into the country that afternoon to buy a setter puppy and would like his advice on the purchase.

To his vast relief they had luncheon alone, and they

also made alone the journey to the country, where Miss Maxwell bought from a dog-fancier an adorable and highly pedigreed white setter puppy with tan ears, tan specks on his nose, and an affectionate nature. He gave the young couple one glance from his amber eyes, decided that they belonged to him, and went peacefully to sleep stretched between them on the seat of the roadster. There he slumbered during a brisk run of one hundred miles through a November haze, a run Miss Maxwell made in a little more than two hours.

"He ought to be called 'Freckles,' " David suggested, with an appreciative finger on the tan specks on the puppy's nose.

" 'Freckles' is a darling name for him," Dorinda agreed. " 'Freckles' he shall be."

She stepped on the gas in her enthusiasm, and the roadster, which had been making only fifty miles an hour, swept onward at sixty. David was not a nervous young man, but long before the end of the run he realized that his future perils would include considerable risk to life and limb. The girl's driving was only six months old, and the risks she took made her companion's hair rise. He showed no signs of this uneasiness, because he saw that from time to time she glanced at him out of the corner of an eye in search of them. More tests of him, no doubt. He was getting rather fed up with tests. Once, when she had nearly ditched the car by rounding a sharp curve without slackening speed, she briefly apologized. He met the apology with

a slight start and an absent stare, as if he had not observed the incident, and he was glad to see that this annoyed her. But she left him safely at the front door of Mrs. Kemp's boarding-house at six o'clock, an hour nicely timed to have his advent witnessed by most of its inmates. Both she and he were impressed by the whole-heartedness with which the boarders gave themselves to the spectacle.

He had just time to dress and hurry back to take her out to dinner, and as he severely assailed the stubborn wave with his hair-brush he told himself that the afternoon had not been half bad.

"I want to give you that pup," he had said, when he heard the price and realized that it would not exhaust his bank-roll. "You say it's your first dog, so I'd like it to be my first real gift to you. I'll train him for you, too."

She had been very nice about it. He could see that she was really pleased, and without protest she had let him have his way.

They dined together before the staring eyes of Grandon's five hundred and played their respective rôles rather gallantly. David, indeed, surprised himself. He found it easy to rest his arms on the table and to lean across them and give his companion his whole attention, as he had seen other fellows do when they were so deeply in love that they forgot where they were. She was looking amazingly pretty, though rather overdressed for a young girl. He had been about enough

with conservative girls to recognize the difference. She was painted, too, up to her eyes; but, then, nowadays even the conservative girls carried striking color schemes on their faces. Brown seemed the favorite undertone this season, with vivid touches of scarlet. For the first time the thought came to him that it would be rather wonderful to show the world a wife who looked as Miss Maxwell looked, especially as the world would n't know she was not a wife after all.

And now here they were, together at the theater, to be seen by the remaining few who counted and who had not seen them at dinner. David stared at the stage. He had no idea what the play was about, though his eyes followed it. During the intermissions he gave his companion his whole attention, and it took some thinking between times to have enough sprightly topics ready. He had to admit, however, that Miss Maxwell played up admirably. Thank Heaven, she was n't the sort who put the whole conversational burden on a man! She had topics and ideas of her own.

"Did you like the Butterflies?" she now abruptly asked him. The question was one he had been dreading, and he wondered why it had not come up before, as they had spent the entire afternoon together. He found some difficulty in holding to the look of interested animation he had assumed for the public.

"It is n't as if I had met them for the first time, you know," he hedged. "I've known Bailey and Miss

Perkins, in a way, ever since I came to Grandon, about a year and a half ago. Bryant I'd met only once or twice, but of course I knew all about him."

"But did you like them?" his companion persisted.

"I liked Miss Perkins's playing. She's the real thing as a pianiste. I'd heard that, but I was n't expecting anything as ripping as her music is."

"Did you like them?"

David set his teeth and his smile faded. If this was the sort she was, it opened alarming vistas.

"Look here," he said seriously, "do you really want me to tell you the truth about things when we're talking, or to lie to you?"

"I want the truth, of course. I'm used to it. You'll have to admit that I have that, at least, from the Butterflies."

"I can't admit anything of the sort," he said coolly. "I think the individuals in that crowd say whatever they think is clever and striking, whether they believe it or not."

"They don't," she told him with tight lips.

"All right. I'm simply giving you my impression."

"Then you don't like them."

"Of course I don't like them. You know perfectly well I don't like them."

"Why don't you? Can't you see their good points?"

"No. To me they have n't any. To me, they're an insincere, self-obsessed, and pretty rotten lot. I



was impressed for a little while the other night because they listened to the music and understood and liked it, because for an hour they acted like civilized human beings and not like savages. But after all, why did they? Simply because for the time being they were warm and fed and in a state of animal comfort, and because the music was really unique. It was less trouble to them to listen than to do anything else. If it had occurred to them to get up and kick the pictures off your walls they 'd have done that."

"I don't know why I started this," she murmured. "You were doing so beautifully, and now I've got you all stirred up. I *must* learn not to do that sort of thing!"

The curtain was going up and she caught his grin through the semi-darkness.

"All my fault," he contritely told her. "I could have answered your question without delivering a lecture. You may as well realize, though, that I've got a tendency to lay down the law."

A voice behind them uttered a sibilant *s-s-s-h*, and they subsided, mutually forgiving. After the play they walked home together, through a night that happened to be clear and starlit. Under their feet the hard snow crunched with a pleasant sound. When they reached the Maxwell house it was brightly lighted and strains of music came to them as they approached the front door. Obviously the Butterflies had assembled.

"Will you come in?" Dorinda asked when he had opened the door with her latch-key.

"Must I?"

"Not if you don't want to. In fact, you need n't, anyway. I'll let them know by a few casual remarks that we've been together ever since noon, and that will give them enough to think about."

"Good night, then. Thanks awfully for a jolly day."

But he went off with the sensation of a released school-boy, and she watched him understandingly as he sprinted down to the big entrance gate. She was relieved to find that her guests were only the triumvirate. She would not have been surprised to find two dozen young persons in her house, several of whom she had never seen before. She had encouraged just such informal gatherings. But to-night there was an actual effect of sedateness in the library. A big fire spouted tongues of flame up the chimney. Kitty was at the piano, playing a Busoni Sonatina, while Chad and Jim sat before the fireplace with a modest decanter of whisky on a small table between them, and half-empty glasses in their hands. They paid no attention to her entrance. It was all too peaceful to be real, and she lingered by the door waiting for the effect she knew was planned.

"What I want to know," Chad began in clear tones, "is where she's going to get off. If she marries that chap she'll have to murder him within a year

to be rid of him, and I suppose even the murder of Goddard might bring some unpleasant consequences on whoever did it."

"Perhaps the law will spare her because of the unborn child," Kitty suggested over her shoulder.

"I think," Bryant said thoughtfully, "it would be better for one of us to murder him now and save her all that discomfort. I will do it, if you say so. There are possibilities of sacrifice in my nature that I have never realized before."

"I'll go along and watch you do it," Chad contributed. "I'd *like* to see it done," he warmly added.

Dorinda joined them at the fire and dropped into a chair, relaxed and amused.

"Shut your eyes and let us fan you," Chad suggested sympathetically. "Jim, get a wet towel and roll the couch this way. A whole afternoon with Goddard has been a bit too much for our young friend. But let's not have too abrupt a change. Kitty, a hymn, please."

Dorinda laughed.

"I do feel a little let down," she admitted.

"Let down! One hour alone with David would let me down into the grave," Chad assured her, as he ostentatiously fanned her with an embroidered table scarf. Bryant brought her a cigarette. Kitty flooded the room with the simple harmonies of "Where He Leads Me I Will Follow," singing the words in a throaty but agreeable contralto. But under it all

Dorinda felt a new atmosphere. There was genuine affection in the eyes Chad turned on her and in the way Jim tucked a pillow behind her back. Moreover, despite the excellent opportunity to drink too much whisky, none of the three had done so. It became clear that they suspected danger to their friend and had rallied to her fancied need; that they were even prepared to make a fight for her, despite their deep-rooted objection to effort of any kind.

Having finished the hymn, Kitty swung into a new refrain:

“Ain’t love wonderful!  
How do I know?  
Why, you great big booby,  
I ’m telling you so.”

Chad fired his opening gun to the final strains of this selection.

“Dorinda,” he began, and at the crisp sound of the word Kitty stopped singing and came over to the group, leaning a restful elbow on the mantelpiece as she stood facing them, her coiffure, as usual, rakishly one-sided, “you ’re not going to make a fool of yourself, are you?”

“Not if I know it,” Dorinda promised.

“Well, you ’ll know it, all right, for we ’re going to point it out,” Chad went on. “What ’s the idea, anyway? Is it true that you ’ve been out all day with that reservoir of smugness?”

“Mr. Goddard and I have been together since one

o'clock," Dorinda admitted. "Can't I study a new type if I want to?"

"Not all day. Besides, you can read that type across the street," Jim somberly submitted. "It's a spread-head," he bitterly added, to underline his meaning.

"Look here." Dorinda sat up, and her green-gray eyes narrowed as they moved from face to face. "What is this? Have we reached the point where I can't make a new friend without apologizing and explaining and defending myself and him?"

Jim shook his head at her.

"It won't do, Dorinda," he said gently. "You can't put us off that way. You know very well you can have all the friends you want. But this episode looks serious. You appear to be falling in love with Goddard, and to have fallen about ten thousand feet already. Your parachute is giving out and you're due for a frightful smash."

"All right. When I get it you can talk. Till then, please don't."

She saw them exchange glances and caught the message telegraphed from eye to eye.

"Dorinda!" For once the faun was serious. "You don't know anything about Goddard except that he's easy to look at. He's a self-centered, intolerant, narrow-minded, holier-than-thou prig, eaten up by ambition, and ready to do anything or anybody to get where he wants to be. If he marries you it will be for your money, for you and he have n't an idea in com-

mon and in the smug soul of him he disapproves of everything about you. I'd give him less than a year to break your heart."

"If we thought we could get at him in any way," Jim took up the arraignment where Chad had dropped it, "that is, if we could make him human by injecting him with some healthy and redeeming vices, there would n't be so much risk for you. But I don't flatter myself we can. He's too well protected by his cast-iron armor of self-righteousness."

Dorinda addressed no one in particular:

"Is that all?"

"Is n't it enough?" Kitty asked. "If it is n't, I'll discourse a while. Jim and Chad did n't leave out much, but I can mention a few things they forgot."

"Don't." Dorinda decided that she had had enough of this.

"Listen, children," she went on, "I've let you talk, though when you've thought it over you'll agree with me that you've been a little premature. Now I'll talk, for the first, last, and only time on this subject, so don't miss what I say. It's simply this: I've never appointed you three my guardians or my advisers or my chaperons, or anything of that sort. And I don't want any opinions from you, at any time, about myself or my conduct or my other friends."

She heard Chad's awed exclamation:

"My God! we were right! She's in love with the fellow!"



"I suppose you meant well," she went on. "Folks usually do when they go blundering into the affairs of others. I thought you three were above that sort of thing, and I'm simply amazed that you're not. But please don't blunder again.—Now, Kitty, if you will sit down and play for a long time, it may help to clear the atmosphere."

As Kitty drifted back to the piano, replacing a hair-pin that had repudiated its obligations, Chad picked up the decanter of whisky.

"We'll have to kill him, after all," he announced to the opening movements of the "Waldstein" Sonata. "But not necessarily to-night. Come on, Jim, make yourself comfy."

Jim solemnly raised his glass.

"To the memory of a loved and lost Dorinda," he sighed.

Thereafter the two young men devoted themselves to the whisky in the manner of those who had seen their duty, had done it, and were now prepared to call it a day.

## CHAPTER VII

**D**AVID GODDARD'S courtship of Dorinda Maxwell, by this time the pet topic of Grandon, ran gratifyingly true to form. He motored with her, walked with her, took her out to luncheon, to dinner, and to tea, and dined and lunched with her several times a week in her own home. The triumvirate adapted themselves to the new routine with a speed that did credit to their good sense. The townspeople were rather slower to do so, and motherly women showed a disposition to turn the young man from the error of his ways by sadly shaking their heads over him when they met him in neutral territory.

But after a few weeks the most persistent students of the affair were forced to admit that Goddard's character was not deteriorating and that his influence over Miss Maxwell seemed beneficial. She had furnished them with no fresh scandals since the courtship began. No further public baths were taken in the fountain on the Maxwell lawn, though one explanation of this lay in the fact that the pool in the fountain was now frozen over. There had been no more too-lively parties, and apparently no more all-night dancing at Kelly's or other road-houses. Though the Butter-

flies still visited Dorinda at all hours, there was little in their conduct to criticize, aside from an occasional unevenness of gait as they came and went. Gradually Grandon awoke to the discovery that there was a definite improvement here, and that possibly the town's black sheep might yet retrieve herself by a marriage to an eminently worthy young man who was guaranteed by those who knew him intimately to be the sort that stands no nonsense.

Goddard could not fail to observe that his associates in the offices of Hatch, Fuller, and Kimball regarded him with a deepening interest shot through with apprehension. The manner of Hatch, indeed, had been alarmingly paternal ever since the day of the lawyer's second talk with Dorinda, when she had persuaded Hatch to withhold judgment for another month. David also had reason to feel that the office boy and the stenographers were impressed by his new clothes. Being an exacting young man, he sought even further evidences of progress, and just before Christmas he approached Miss Maxwell on a rather delicate subject.

"I thought you were going to cultivate some new people," he submitted, "and try to widen your circle."

"So I am, but not too soon," she serenely told him. Her poise these days was in sharp contrast to his own nervousness. "We must n't rush things. They're going beautifully, just the way we want them to go. We'll let people think we're too absorbed in each other to remember that they're alive. If Norma were here,"

she added, "it would be different. She could help me so much. As it is, we must wait."

Her tone sobered on the last words. Inwardly, she was annoyed and deeply hurt by the defection of Norma Davis. She had given Norma a fortnight, a month at the most, to approve of the new conditions and to call on her again; and instead of doing either of these things, Norma had departed for Florida without even a telephoned message of farewell. Dorinda realized that no social campaign could be started till Norma came home. Immediately after that she would announce her engagement, and then it would be the clear duty of her friend to sanction her reform by giving her a luncheon or a dinner, and inviting the town's most exacting buds and matrons. How abysmally that affair would bore one! Dorinda shuddered at the prospect of it.

Goddard was following his own line of thought.

"Is n't it about time I proposed to you?" he mildly inquired. Dorinda looked at him admiringly.

"You 're indefatigable," she admitted. "You count that day lost whose low descending sun sees no worthy action done, don't you? But why in Heaven's name do you want to propose to me?"

"So we can announce our engagement."

"You 're awfully systematic, too," she went on. "I should n't have felt that in these conditions a proposal was necessary. However, I suppose you 're right, as usual. It will be better if I can say to awed groups,

a few years hence, 'It was in this spot, under the mistle-toe, that David asked me . . .' Besides, I'll need some circumstantial details for the Butterflies. Poor Butterflies!" she added simply; "they'll take it hard. They've almost decided that it's just a flash in the pan. They're born optimists, you know."

Goddard wasted no sympathy on the Butterflies. He had accepted them, as they accepted him, with inward disgust and outward cheerfulness. He passed through various reactions concerning them, but he never really changed his basic impressions. Always he thrilled to Kitty's music. At times Bryant drew him into a morass of discussion and left him stranded there. He admitted that he was no match for Bryant in mental and lingual agility. He laughed with Chad as much as at him. But he regarded the three as monkeys in the tree of life, and they knew it.

"When shall I propose?" he repeated. "Christmas Eve?"

Dorinda reflected. The suggestion rather appealed to her.

"You might, if you thought you could do it prettily. Can you?"

He grinned.

"Don't know, but I'll study up a bit."

"You ought to be able to do it awfully well," she told him, "being able to put a mind on it unclouded by passion."

"I'll be frightfully nervous, I suppose," he mused, wishing she would n't say that sort of thing.

"Nervousness is n't emotion," she said severely, and they both laughed. The fact that they laughed together a good deal was a reassuring discovery. Reassuring, too, was the discovery of each that on the whole a healthy liking was developing between them. To be sure, this was obscured at times by gusts of anger. Dorinda's little air of superiority often made David furious. It was as if she had determined never to let him forget that she held the upper hand—that she was in control of the situation. He made her equally furious, though of course he did not realize this, by the unconscious mental arrogance he displayed. He did not reason with her, as Chad and even Bryant did; he made statements and expected her to accept them. Usually she felt that he was right, but she would have liked a little more modesty about it.

When they were with others he played the rôle agreed upon. When they were alone he was as matter-of-fact and as impersonal as a machine. When she had headaches—her sole indisposition—he wore an I-told-you-so and reminiscent air that was nothing short of infuriating. Yet she knew he was not without sympathy. He had proved that on the most tragic night of her life, when he had brought her home from Norma's party to her mother's death-bed. She could never forget the gentle and natural way in which he had put his



arm around her, when she slipped on the front steps in her haste to mount them, and helped her the rest of the way, or his look when she came downstairs again to dismiss him after his short and voluntary vigil. No, emphatically he was not without sympathy. Her constant companion Freckles, now under David's efficient training, looked upon him as a god; and when the puppy injured a paw and refused to let her touch it, she was forced to admire the combined skill and gentleness with which David treated it.

"Stick it out, boy. Let's have it," he would order, and Freckles, with utter trust in the amber eyes that never left his god's face, would stick it out.

"He's my dog, but I'm afraid he cares more for you than he does for me," Dorinda mentioned once or twice. But Freckles trailed her like a shadow, and when the injury temporarily checked his activities he slept at her feet or preferably in her lap, from which refuge David was unable to lure him. David's lap, Freckles had decided, was a spot no sane puppy would waste time in.

Mid-December found in both Goddard and Dorinda the conviction that the other had fine points; but, given a chance, each would rapturously have slipped the leash of their bargain if that had seemed possible.

On Christmas Eve David walked to Dorinda's house with two gifts for her in his pocket. One was an engagement-ring, which he was firmly determined to put on her finger before the evening was over. The

other was a card-case that he assumed would be useful when her new social life began. At present, he admitted, a card-case was one of those things Miss Maxwell could do without. He would not have much time to dwell on his proposal or to enjoy her reception of these gifts, for she was having a party. He was glad of that. The less time he had for the proposal the better; and it would not take her long to thank him for the card-case. He would have been delighted to give her something worthier, but his savings-bank account was getting low, so low that it frightened him. Quite obviously it also worried the paying teller of his bank, a friend of his who had persuaded him to start the account. This man, whose name was Jeffreys, handed out dollars from Goddard's diminishing supply almost as reluctantly as if they were his own. He was a sad-faced person, and his expression of gloom deepened with every visit David made to his bank. It was clear that he took the darkest view of his friend's actions and prospects.

David himself was feeling increasingly gloomy. He had been forced to buy the engagement-ring on the instalment plan—a condition that intensely humiliated him. But one thing was certain, he decided, setting his jaw. He would pay for it out of his salary from Hatch, Fuller, and Kimball, and not with any part of the quarterly allowance given him by Mrs. David Goddard. At thought of this quarterly allowance his brown face burned. It always did burn, he discovered,

when he pictured himself accepting that stipend. A beastly business he had let himself in for. But so far, at least, he was financially on his own feet. Of course the twenty dollars a week he had allowed for expenses turned out an under-estimate, as he might have known it would do. In the six weeks of his acquaintance with Miss Maxwell he had spent over three hundred dollars, not including the first payment on a comparatively simple engagement-ring.

All sorts of things had come up, and Dorinda had let them come. On various occasions David had even found himself the unwilling host of the Triumvirate. After her one protest she had apparently dropped the matter of his expenses from her mind. No doubt she thought her five thousand a year would make it up to him. Her five thousand a year! Again he felt his face grow hot. And yet, why should it? This was a business proposition. There was nothing but business in it. But for the life of him he could not make it seem like business. With a great effort he dislodged the subject from his mind. He would handle that mess when he came to it.

Meantime, there was to-night, Christmas Eve, with dinner at Miss Maxwell's and a party afterward—a party quite surprisingly to his taste. He had abysmally expected, and dreaded, a celebration for the Butterflies, and it was clear that the Butterflies had expected this, too. But Miss Maxwell, it suddenly developed, had plans of her own. She was giving a party

for children—for the town's poorest children. It had begun by chance, with a casual promise to give a little tree to the brood of the laundress who worked several days a week in the Maxwell house. It had taken in the friends of the children and the friends of their friends; and suddenly it had grown into a big tree, to be set up in the Maxwell drawing-room for the benefit of fifty small invited guests from the town's tenements. Dorinda had spent days shopping, and decorating the tree, and the Triumvirate, recovering from the first shock of disappointment, had ably helped her. She had bought dozens of candy canes and apples and oranges and toys and bags of nuts. She had bought presents for every child. She had prepared a feast of sandwiches and ice-cream and cakes. David and the Triumvirate were coming to an early dinner, served at half-after six, that the younger guests might be received and the tree stripped at eight. Little place on the program for a proposal, yet this was the time she herself had set, assuring him that he might propose to her if he could do it prettily. He would try to do it prettily; he would certainly do it briskly.

The Triumvirate arrived on time, together, as usual, and surprisingly bearing gifts for their hostess. Kitty brought her a special English plum-pudding, gay with red ribbons and holly. Chad's gift was a cocktail-mixer, obviously intended for his own use.

"You have needed this a long time," he reproachfully mentioned as he handed it over. Bryant gave her a

bronze Buddha, with neat hair, squatted on an ebony base. At the fitting moment David modestly produced the card-case, and with the Triumvirate's shouts of appreciation the atmosphere of good feeling deepened. Chad explained to Dorinda what a card-case was, and Kitty and Jim insisted on a rehearsal of the owner's first use of it, in which Bryant was the unseeing butler and Miss Perkins the staggered hostess. Even David mentally conceded that when the Butterflies were in this mood they were diverting.

Dorinda's gifts to her guests were beside their service plates—silver cigarette cases, gold-lined, for Kitty, Chad, and Jim; a stamped-leather bill-case for David. He grinned irrepressibly. His bill-case was like Dorinda's card-case. Neither of them had much present use for the other's offering.

"It was mighty thoughtless of you to have these cigarette-cases marked," Chad grumbled, ostentatiously opening his gift to inspect the sterling mark. "Mine will be pawned most of the time, and I'd get much more if it was n't tagged. One thing's sure," he cheerfully added. "You'll always know the state of my finances now. When I'm in funds I will be carrying this case, and, when I'm not, old Levy will be carrying it."

"We have always known the state of your finances, and it has always been rotten," Bryant mentioned.

"It's going to be rottener hereafter," Chad assured the company. "Aunt Julia is tightening up. She says

a lot of her dividends have stopped coming. She even made me resign from the club, though the dues are only twenty-five a year. I may be driven to marry Dorry yet. In fact, only yesterday Aunt Julia asked me why I did n't do it, and I promised I'd think it over. A fellow gets so desperate at times he's ready for almost any mad act. What, nothing to drink but claret and water! Great jumping Jehoshaphat!"

He sank into gloom after this discovery, and Bryant took up the conversation.

"It will be a great thing for the club to have you resign, Chad," he commented. "It will improve it amazingly. I may even go in, myself. I never belonged to but one club," he added reminiscently, "and that was a fine one—the T.H.W.T.M.Y.T.C. I joined it the year I was a newspaper man and we had to work on Christmas Day."

"What did all the initials mean?" Dorinda wanted to know.

"To-Hell-with-the-Merry-Yule-tide Club. Every one on 'The Star' belonged to it," Bryant added simply. "By the way, Dorry, why did you give us cigarette-cases? I should have expected something more original from you. To buy a bill-case for Goddard, and expect him to have anything left to put into it when he is spending his entire salary on you, showed a superb flight of fancy. So did his card-case for you. But we can fill our cigarette-cases right here every day. You ought to have bought Chad a brace of crystal de-



canters and sent them to his room. A cheap phonograph and some jazz records would have been nice for Kitty's studio; you know how she loves canned music. And you might have sent me—"

"A Book of Bedtime Stories, Beautifully Bound," Chad murmured, regarding his empty glass with severe disapproval. "Dorinda, I don't think I can ever marry you, after all. There are depths of cruelty in your nature that appall me. If we can't have anything but claret, can't we at least have the claret where my parched tongue can reach it? Or are you saving it for the Better Baby Movement later in the evening?"

Dorinda regarded him with affectionate eyes.

"Are n't they acting prettily to-night, the darlings?" she asked David. "You would almost think they were conventional."

"We're on our best behavior," Kitty confessed. "But each of us is watching the others with soul-sickening anxiety."

The "best behavior" continued throughout the evening, and David, who had told himself that Dorinda was taking a big chance when she combined tenement infants and their mothers with the Butterflies, mentally admitted that he was mistaken. He also realized that socially, on this occasion, the Triumvirate shone with much more effulgence than he did. He was useful in climbing step-ladders and reaching gifts at the top of the tree; but Kitty developed a way with infants that won passionate encomiums from their mothers; Bryant

devoted himself to the mothers and flattered them till their heads swam; while later in the evening Chad started the phonograph and fox-trotted with a dozen plump women who remained magnificently indifferent to the fact that their infants were ostentatiously falling asleep and, like the hero in the poem, lying where they fell.

Just before ten o'clock David found Dorinda in a corner, settling a drowsy baby more comfortably on a rug and detaching from its reluctant hand an especially sticky lollipop. Above her head was a cluster of shaded electric bulbs on a side bracket, and from this bracket drooped a bunch of holly and mistletoe. For the moment, with forty children and almost two dozen mothers around them, the two were alone. He bowed before her.

"Miss Maxwell," he asked formally, "will you do me the honor to marry me?"

He caught her look of amazement, followed by one of understanding. She had forgotten that to-night was the night set for the proposal, but she was considerably quick on the up-take.

"I will, Mr. Goddard," she assured him; and she added heartily, "and I think it's darned nice of you to ask me, after all I've put you through in the last month!"

They were now standing facing each other, and he took her hand. Two of its fingers were slightly sticky from contact with the lollipop, but neither of these was

the important finger. He had the ring ready, and he slipped it where it belonged.

"I had to guess at the size," he confessed, "but it seems all right, does n't it? Do you like it?"

She looked at the ring and her eyes softened.

"Very much, David. Thank you." It was the first time she had used his Christian name in speaking to him.

He bent and kissed the hand he held. A shrieking group of children, playing Blind-man's Buff, bumped into them and the episode was over.

David wandered away, wondering how he felt about it. Till now he had not been sure that the contract would go through. For all he knew, the girl might have changed her mind and might naturally have experienced some reluctance in telling him so. After their first talk the subject had never been mentioned between them, save on the occasion when they had discussed the proposal. Her silence had been rather disconcerting, but of course he had followed her lead. Now it was settled. No backing out, even if one wanted to. Did one want to? One thought one did. At times one was sickeningly sure that one did. But did one, really?

Chad, fox-trotting down the front hall with a nymph whose weight must be two hundred, emerged from the lady's coy embrace long enough to urge David to get a partner. David hastened to obey. It seemed the least he could do. Every one else was busy. Farther along

the hall Kitty was helping a few conservative mothers to bundle up their sleepy offspring for the outer world. In the drawing-room Bryant and Dorinda were teaching a still wide-awake group the delights of "London Bridge." But there were everywhere signs that the party would soon begin to break up. David approached a stout and quiet person who seemed to be alone. She was Kate, Miss Maxwell's English cook, here by special invitation to have a casual look at the festivities; but she evidently enjoyed the fox-trot through which he efficiently led her. A certain deliberation about her dancing enabled David to converse comfortably. He mentioned, when he had finally grasped her identity, that the Maxwell dinner that evening was the best Christmas dinner he had ever eaten, and that he never hoped for another like it.

"G'wan!" she pleaded coquettishly. "If wot I 'ear is true, you'll 'ave a 'ole lot of my Christmas dinners."

The sympathy between them deepened to a degree that was almost poignant.

## CHAPTER VIII

“I don’t see why we should wait much longer to be married,” Dorinda mentioned.

David moved restlessly in his pet chair before the fireplace. It was New Year’s Day, and they had lunched together and motored a hundred miles after lunch, with a blissful Freckles stretched between them. Now they were back in the Maxwell house, having tea before the fire. They were safe from interruption. Even yet, while the social stock of Miss Maxwell was undoubtedly rising in her native town, no one but members of the Butterflies dropped in on her informally, though myopic ladies who in the past had failed to recognize her in the streets were now doing so with ease and affability. As to the Butterflies, the condition in which they had left the house the night before, after celebrating the entrance of the New Year, had been such as to interfere with any further social efforts on their part for at least twenty-four hours.

It was an excellent time to discuss plans, but David’s most recent memories of the Butterflies were not such as to make him contemplate with pleasure a future which held them in its foreground. They had been what he considered “the limit” last night. They had

been so much the limit that what he most desired was never to see any of them again. But of course he must see them again, and often. That was in the bond. For the thousandth time he asked himself what Dorinda saw in them. She was n't like them, thank God! And yet, incredibly, she was fond of them. Her relief when she realized that they were prepared, however reluctantly, to accept her marriage with David, had amazed him.

"They hate it, as I knew they would, but they'll stand by," she had told him, with shining eyes. But she had been careful not to repeat their comments on the announced engagement.

"We'll stand by till you see the error of your ways and get a nice, scandalous divorce," Chad had promised. "That is, we'll stand by if you'll agree not to spoon before us. I don't think we could bear watching you hold hands and smile into each other's eyes, Dorry. I really don't. The thing that has saved us so far is that you've nobly refrained from spooning in our presence."

"Besides," Jim added, "Dorry may realize her blunder before she marries Goddard. Thousands of girls learn to see for the first time during their engagements."

"Make it a nice long engagement," Kitty begged, "till Mr. Goddard's jaw loses that set look it has. If you don't, I'm perfectly sure he'll polish your hardwood floors with you."

And "a nice, long engagement" the Butterflies as-



sumed that it would be. To-day, in his present mood, David wanted a long engagement, too. Memory threw him a flash picture of Chad Bailey welcoming the New Year on top of the piano, impersonating a faun with the aid of a fur floor mat, and blowing drunkenly at two long wax candles. If this sort of thing was "beauty," David was prepared to rub through life without beauty. If this was companionship, he wanted no more companionship with these three profligates. He could not speak, and Dorinda went on unobservantly.

"If Norma meant to come back soon, I'd wait," she confessed. "I did want her, dreadfully, for so many reasons. But in that formal letter she sent me when I wrote her of our engagement, she said she would n't be back till March. We can't wait that long."

"No," David hastily agreed, "we certainly can't." He had suddenly remembered that his finances would not last that long. Indeed, they were almost exhausted.

"So we can be married almost any day," Dorinda proceeded. "Suppose you have the papers you spoke of drawn up to-morrow; see Mr. Hatch about it early, so he can't dawdle. He'll have a lot of things to do to make me my own mistress. Besides, of course, we must have individual agreements, which we will both sign and keep, admitting that the marriage is n't a real one, and guaranteeing each other entire liberty of action and all that. Not that we could n't trust each other," she added hastily as his expression changed, "but because . . . because . . ."

"Because it's better to have everything in black and white," David agreed. "I will draw up those papers to-night and bring them to you to-morrow."

"We can be married in Chester," Dorinda resumed.

"Very quietly."

"Very quietly. We'll steal away in the morning—say, on Saturday—and be married at noon. Then we can come back here Monday or Tuesday."

"Great Scott! Where are we going in the meantime?"

The exclamation burst from him so irrepressibly that Dorinda laughed. He had not realized that a fake honeymoon journey might be included in his expenses.

"I don't know, but we've got to go somewhere," she good-humoredly pointed out. "It would look awfully queer if we didn't. We'll take the roadster, and I thought we could motor for a few days, if you like, while the town is getting over the first excitement."

"That's a good idea," David agreed. They never talked much when they were motoring.

"We must telegraph the details of the wedding to the newspapers here, right after the ceremony," Dorinda went on, thinking aloud.

"I'll get the license to-morrow and see the minister at Chester; and I must ask Hatch for a few days off," David mused in his turn.

"He'll give them. He'll be immensely relieved to know he can drop the responsibility of me on your shoulders. He has been feeling it a lot lately, the poor

dear. I'm quietly having Father's rooms put in order for you," Dorinda went on; "papered and painted and generally freshened up. There's a sitting-room, a bedroom and a bath-room, all comfortable; but of course when you get into them you can make any changes you like. They connect with mine," she added lightly. "Mine used to be Mother's. Naturally, we've got to think of the servants."

David turned his eyes to the fire. Modern girls were amazing. They took his breath away. She was saying all this as sexlessly as if she were a phonograph.

"There's another point," she continued. "I'm going to get a big check cashed, and give you your first quarter's salary and our expense money before we start. Of course you will pay all the bills, and pay them here at home, too, after we get back. We will have a joint checking-account—that's probably the best way to manage it. It will be such a comfort to have all that off my hands," she added earnestly. "I loathe business, but I think you'll see that I've kept everything pretty straight so far."

"I don't mind telling you that this financial end of the business gives me the pip," David admitted. "But all right. Everything will be just as you say, of course."

For a moment he looked very much as if he had the pip. He had opened his mouth to announce his determination to pay the wedding expenses, and had sud-

denly recalled the embarrassing detail that he could not do it.

The interview with Hatch the following morning went off with less nervous strain than he had expected. Evidently the lawyer had been looking for some such confidences, for he accepted without surprise David's brief statement, and nodded agreement with the idea of a quiet wedding.

"Very wise, in the circumstances. I've realized that this was coming," he told the young man, "and I need n't tell you it's a big relief to me, a very big one. I knew Dorinda was pretty sure to take the only way that meant liberty, but I was afraid she'd pick the wrong man—some youth I could n't exactly object to and yet would hesitate to approve. I might have known that the odd streak of common sense she has would come to the top in this matter. I suppose you've discovered that she has a very unusual mind. . . .

"But I did n't dare to hope she would marry so soon," Hatch went on when David had offered his tribute to the mind of his fiancée. "She seemed so bitter against marriage. However, all's well that ends well," he finished, almost jubilantly.

But it was clear that Hatch had difficulty in concealing his disapproval of the pre-nuptial contract.

"Does you credit, of course, as a matter of delicacy," he admitted, "but my dear fellow—"

"It's all settled between Miss Maxwell and myself," David urgently submitted.

"Quite so, quite so. But there are so many contingencies. There should be some provision for the children—"

"Dorinda will attend to all that. She will probably make a new will," David hurriedly assured him.

"Yes, yes. She'll have to. I'm glad you want to continue your work here." Hatch was a tactful man.

"Rather! My wife will have to run the house, of course; but I want to be able to pay for my own clothes and car fares at least."

"Naturally . . . of course." Hatch was beginning to realize that there was something under the surface of all this. Now that he looked at him closely, Goddard was not giving him the impression of a happily expectant bridegroom. David read the thought and grinned.

"You see," he explained, "all this money business is rather embarrassing for a fellow that has n't a cent. But at least my marrying Miss Maxwell need n't add to her expenses, and if we waited till I could support a wife it might be a matter of four or five years."

"Exactly . . . and very sensible of you both not to wait. Take a week off, with the firm's compliments, and let us know if there's anything else we can do."

Hatch held out a friendly pink hand, but he was not deceived. There seemed something queer about this

marriage. And yet, on the other hand, as the young man had intimated, it *might* be merely embarrassment over money matters.

"Under the circumstances," he went on, "you might like a little advance of, say, two hundred dollars, to be repaid in monthly instalments of twenty or twenty-five after you get back."

"That's most awfully good of you, Mr. Hatch, and I shall be glad to have it." David recalled with surprise certain critical thoughts of Hatch which he had harbored in the past.

"It's a pleasure, my boy. You will probably want the money at once. I'll give you an order on the cashier."

Hatch wrote out the order, with a benign smile. It seemed to him a small thing to do for one who was taking off his hands the responsibility of Dorinda Maxwell's future. At the same time, he experienced a disturbing sympathy for the youth before him.

"Start your vacation a day or two before the wedding," he advised. "You have various matters to attend to."

"No, thank you, sir. Saturday will be soon enough, if you will let me have this afternoon off. I'd like to run over to Chester."

David's personal preparations for his wedding were made in half an hour. He bought some new collars and ties and a new traveling bag. He had already invested in the sport outfit Dorinda recommended and



in a new business suit as well. Dorinda, he was glad to see, was genuinely interested in his general effect. She had approved the sport suit and had referred to one or two of his ties with approval. She appeared to realize that henceforth this young man would, in a way, represent her as well as himself before the world. David understood, recalling a day when he abruptly realized that whatever Dorinda was or looked or became would, in a way, react on him.

He had a rather pleasant moment that night when, in the Maxwell library, he lightly pushed aside the two bundles of bank-notes the lady took out of a drawer in her father's desk.

"This is your salary," she explained, "and this is for the monthly household bills. They will be about five hundred a month, if they run as they have been running. Our garden carries us in the matter of fruit and vegetables, and we have always put up enough in the summer-time to take us through the winter. Jane Kelly was a good manager,—I'll say that for her,—so I'm following her methods. I put in all our coal and wood last August, and our only household bills now are for servants' wages and light and meat and groceries."

He liked this practical side of her, of which he had been given glimpses before. It was probably the one good quality old Maxwell had bequeathed her. There had never been any doubt of the old fellow's business ability. The homely discussion brought David closer

to her than he had ever felt. It almost convinced him that this crazy deal was really going through. But when she pushed the bundles of bank-notes nearer, his firm jaw set instinctively.

"Suppose we let that end of it ride a while?" he hastily suggested, a nervous palm stroking his hair.

"But you'll have to pay the bills—"

"I'll pay them, all right. I've got plenty of money to go on with till we get back."

"But you will have to pay the household bills," she persisted. "Think of how it will look if you don't. Besides, it's settled. I got the money from Mr. Hatch this noon, and started a joint account in our names at the First National Bank. All you have to do is to go there and leave your signature."

"All right," he repeated. "I'll pay the household bills from that account. You can deposit five hundred the first of every month, and we'll keep within it." He had decided that it would not matter which of them signed those household checks, so he might as well do it. "But about the salary," he went on nervously, "I want you to hold on to that for a while."

"Why?"

He had never seen quite so cold a light in those green-gray eyes before. They were like certain glaciers he had studied in the one pleasure-jault of his life, a summer expedition with a classmate to the Canadian Rockies. The coldness was accompanied by another look that was becoming familiar—a look as

if a dark mask had settled down over her features.

"I . . . I want it to accumulate."

"Very well. You can put it in the bank and let it accumulate."

There was no question that Maxwell's daughter had inherited his brains. In that moment she talked, and strangely looked, like a middle-aged business woman.

"But, you see, I sha'n't need it," he tried to explain. "I shall be living here, with no personal expenses, so I'd rather let it lie."

"You can't do that," she said curtly. "I like to pay my debts when they're due. Look here,—” she gave him a glance as menacing as an upraised blade,—“are you trying to get out of this at the last minute?"

"Great Scott, no! of course not!"

"Then, again, what is the idea?"

He could not tell her that the mere sight of that money on the table between them filled him with an actual physical nausea.

"I had hoped you would keep it for me," he faltered. "If I had it I might do some fool thing—lose it in speculation. You know, I've never had more than five hundred dollars at a time in my life. The thought of it is oppressive."

He drew a deep breath. He could truthfully say that. The thought of it was most infernally oppressive. At sight of his discomfort her face softened. All this *was* embarrassing for him, of course.

"I might arrange it this way," she slowly conceded:

"I will start an account in your name at the Hull Savings Bank, and deposit your salary there every time it is due. They will think I'm attending to it because you're too busy. And I'll make the deposit in cash, not by check. Will that suit you?"

"It will be fine . . . and mighty good of you," he hastily agreed. He reflected that he need never draw on that account if he did n't want to. But perhaps he would want to some day, if time gave him a different slant on the situation. In the meantime he was genuinely grateful to the girl for making matters as easy for him as she could. She was being very tactful and considerate.

She retrieved the bank-notes and put them into a drawer, which she locked with one of the keys in a small key-book she was carrying. He was beginning to realize how surprisingly efficient she was about many things.

"Shall you want to use this desk?" she asked as she closed it. "You may if you like. But there's one almost as good up in your study."

"Thanks. I'll confine myself to that one, and leave this for you."

"Then everything's arranged. You've got the license, engaged the minister, fixed the hour?"

"It's all done. But—" on an impulse he braced himself for a hard task—"don't misunderstand me, Dorinda . . . I'm reminding you of this for your own sake . . . , there's still time to stop, you know.

No one knows anything about our engagement except Hatch and the minister and the license clerk and bank clerks—half a dozen in all, besides the Butterflies. Are you *sure* you want to go on with it?"

"Are n't you?" Her voice was cold again.

"I'm willing to do anything you say. But I've been doing a lot of thinking since our talk. I'm a little scared . . . for you. You say I'm to be a watch-dog. But how can I be even a good watch-dog? I'm young and green. I have n't had any experience of life to speak of. You need a man who's older and a lot wiser than I am, some one you would listen to. Can you see yourself listening to me—ever?"

"Yes."

Surprisingly, she smiled at him.

"I believe you really are thinking of me," she admitted.

"Of course I'm thinking of you. But I'm thinking of myself, too," he added honestly. "For both our sakes I don't want to make a failure of this business; yet what reason is there to hope that we can make a success of it?"

She looked at him for what seemed a long time. He wondered what was passing in her mind.

"How do you feel about me now?" she asked at last. "I mean compared with the way you felt at first."

"I've decided that you're a lot more of a girl than I thought you were."

"Good! And I've decided that there's even more in you than I thought. I'm getting fond of having you around. I like you the way I like Freckles."

"Thanks," he said ironically.

"And it's perfectly clear that you have n't an atom of sentiment about me."

"Not an atom, except the sentiment of friendship," he agreed, so earnestly that she laughed out. He liked her laugh and grinned in sympathy.

"Then I think we're making a good bargain, and I'm strong for it."

"All right, Dorinda, so am I."

After this, to them both, the marriage ceremony the following Saturday morning seemed something of an anti-climax. For one thing the weather was abominable. The temperature had risen and then abruptly dropped, the roads were covered with slush, and during the ceremony in the close little parlor of the Chester parsonage a cold and heavy rain hissed at them through the windows. The sole witness was the minister's wife, not at all the plump and cushiony person called for by the tradition of such occasions, but a meager, acid woman, who made no secret of her dark conviction that these two were laying up trouble for themselves.

For motoring the conditions could hardly have been worse, and after the ceremony and a few well-meant



but rather confused words from the clergyman, the young couple climbed into the curtained roadster and looked at each other uncertainly through the rain.

"Well, how about it?" Goddard suggested as he took the wheel. It had been agreed that he should drive that day. "We'll have to travel mighty slowly and we'll skid all over the road; but if you like we can get to Carlisle before six to-night, in plenty of time for dinner and the theater. Or would you rather go to the hotel at Britain? They say it's good, and it's only forty miles away."

"Heavens, no! What would we do when we got there? They have n't even a moving-picture house in the town. Go on to Carlisle, where people are alive!"

As the little roadster slithered through the slush, Mrs. David Goddard leaned back against the seat with a sigh of exasperation.

"I'm beginning to think we've made an awful mistake," she suddenly announced.

"Of course you are, a day like this," her companion agreed.

"Don't you feel the same way?" she persisted.

"No, I don't. And if I did," he added rather coldly, "I would n't admit it."

Then compunction seized him. He reminded himself that this girl, however unjust and unreasonable she was in her present mood, had shown an amazing confidence in him. He turned and smiled at her.

"We're in this now," he said gently, "and I've made

up my mind it's going to be a big success. All it calls for is common sense, and we've both got that. So brace up. It's going to be all right."

She liked the words and the smile. She liked the expression in his eyes and the clear-cut lines of his face, and his broad shoulders, and the general good looks of him. She was ashamed of her outburst, and yet, for some reason, she could not meet him half-way.

"Oh, I suppose it will be all right," she almost snapped. "But the prospect of the next two days is simply awful. I wish to Heaven we had brought Freckles along," she ended peevishly. "He'd have cheered us up."

After that the bridegroom gave his attention to his driving, and the roadster struggled on to Carlisle in a silence broken only by the purr of the engine and the rising voice of the storm.

## CHAPTER IX

**A**T Carlisle that evening the bridegroom earnestly endeavored to make his bride take a less gloomy view of the day's experiences. He ordered a pleasant suite of rooms, with an open fire in their common sitting-room, and he raced through the rain to a near-by florist's, that the effect of the new environment might be further brightened by flowers. He and Dorinda ate their dinner in the big dining-room of the hotel, to the noisy accompaniment of a jazz band whose music was at least well intentioned, and later he secured two good seats for what proved to be a fairly amusing comedy. Dorinda also appeared to enjoy the Welsh rarebit served in the hotel grill-room after the play. Indeed, when, following the little supper, he was leaving her at the door of their sitting-room, to go on to his own quarters a few feet down the hall, she had regained a philosophy that was a fair substitute for cheerfulness. ♦

"We 'll have breakfast at nine," she suggested, "and it might be better if we have it up here in our sitting-room instead of in that morgue downstairs."

David acquiesced, wondering how, in her limited

experience, she had discovered the peculiarly depressing quality of the average hotel dining-room in the early-morning hours.

"And forgive me for being such a pig this noon," she apologized. "I was horrid."

"It is n't to be wondered at. You were having a beastly time of it. Good night."

David went on to his own room, vastly comforted. He was glad Dorinda had shown that sign of contrition. It heartened him to a degree that made him whistle softly as he moved about his room preparing for the night. The hotel was a good one, and his quarters held all the necessities and many of the luxuries of furnishing. Among the latter was a shaded reading-lamp, on which he turned an eye of warm approval. He had taken the precaution to bring several books with him, and now he expected to read for an hour or two. But when he got into bed his unusual fatigue reminded him that he also had gone through a long day and a taxing one. The driving had been very hard. Twice, despite his care, the roadster skidded badly, and the second time this happened the lady had shown a strong impulse to take the wheel. He had not allowed her to do this, and during the remainder of the journey the ice formed between them by her confession of discouragement had perceptibly thickened. Now, the situation was brightening. They would have better weather to-morrow and lunch at a good road-house,—the luncheon served them to-day

had been unfit to eat,—and the afternoon run would not be long, only to Dalton. There was a theater at Dalton, where Sunday-night performances were given by what was said to be a good stock company. He had made inquiries.

He snapped off the light of the reading-lamp and drawing the bed covering up to his chin blinked drowsily at the glow coming through the transom. He had not been mistaken about the good qualities of the girl who henceforth would bear his name. She had acted like the devil,—there was no getting away from that,—but she had apologized like a thoroughbred. Being a woman, she would undoubtedly continue to act like the devil at intervals. He understood that they always did. He was therefore prepared for it and would not mind the occasions so much if she retained the sporting spirit that made her realize and admit what she had done. It was the beasts who never confessed themselves in the wrong that he could n't stand for, he told himself. With this sage reflection, and in touching unconsciousness that he himself rarely confessed to being in error about anything, the bridegroom fell asleep.

His awakening was disappointing, for the first sound he heard was the continued beat of the rain on his one window. It had not stopped, then. That was a bad outlook for the day. He yawned, glanced at his watch, and sat up with a spectacular jerk. Half-past eight! Only 'half an hour to get ready for breakfast,

and he had already discovered that young Mrs. Goddard did not like to be kept waiting. He heard her splashing in the bath-room between their rooms, whose door he had carefully bolted on her side, and his spirits rose. She was n't much ahead of him, after all. He put on a red bath-robe, admirably designed to lend cheerfulness to any setting, and raced down the hall to a bath-room he fortunately found unoccupied. That was a bit of luck; and during the setting-up exercises with which he conscientiously followed his bath he told himself that he needed a few bits of luck tossed his way.

He entered their sitting-room on the stroke of nine and found a wood-fire burning, a table set in front of it, and his companion awaiting him in a flame-colored kimono that in cheerfulness was first cousin to his discarded bath-robe. A tactful waiter set the table with his back to them, and an aroma of coffee and bacon filled the air. Dorinda greeted him with a manner in nice harmony with these agreeable conditions.

"It's still raining, but we'll let it, won't we?" she asked gaily, as he hastened to anticipate the waiter in seating her at the table.

"We will," he beamed, as he sat down opposite her and unfolded his napkin. "Any one can motor on lovely days. To motor in weather like this takes some doing."

"Will you have a muffin?"

"I'll have four. I always do. It's a habit of mine



that has been a severe tax on Mrs. Kemp's good nature, but I'm hoping you won't mind it. That will leave two for you," he added, lifting the silver cover from the muffin dish.

"You'll have half of them, and no more," Dorinda severely assured him. "Now I suppose I've got to show my pretty manners. How do you like your coffee?"

It was rather jolly to have her pour his coffee, and put in hot milk as he directed, and lean forward with exaggerated interest to learn how many lumps of sugar he wanted, but she spoiled the effect by airily remarking that he must not expect her to remember these details.

"You will have to tell me all over every time I do it," she confessed. "I'm no good at such things. I never was."

"No ministering angel, eh?" He remembered now that she was n't; he had noticed that she never offered a match or the cigarettes to the Butterflies, or showed any guests the perfunctory courtesies which come so naturally from the average hostess. Even at the Christmas party her attentions to the babies had been in the nature of teaching them games and keeping the phonograph going. She was not the sort of girl who waited on others.

"You ought to learn," he suggested. "You will need such knowledge when you begin to entertain. Meantime you can practise on me whenever you like,"

he added helpfully, as he offered his cup to be refilled. She raised her eyebrows.

“Cream?”

“No, hot milk, please.”

“One lump?”

“Two. Are you afraid of establishing a habit?”

“It’s a dangerous thing to do. Last summer Norma told me about a friend of hers, Janet Walker,—you know Janet,—who was married in June. Janet is an extremely good packer; she has always packed her own trunks and her mother’s and her brother’s, too, when they went on journeys. The morning she and her husband were starting home after their honeymoon she was up early and packed his trunk as well as her own, just from force of old habit. George, her husband, was down at the hotel desk paying bills and tipping servants. She had his trunk locked and even strapped when she suddenly remembered that she was establishing a dangerous precedent. If she did that the first time, of course George would expect her to do it always. So she opened his trunk and carefully unpacked it, and put all his clothes back in the closets and bureau drawers.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever heard a more striking instance of sober second thought,” David commented; but he felt that there was something seriously wrong with the philosophy of Miss Walker, and he experienced a deep sympathy for George.

“Do you think she was right?” he asked curiously.

"I don't know. I have n't thought much about such things. Fortunately, those little problems won't come up between us."

"Won't they? Does that mean you won't expect any of a young husband's usual attentions from me?"

She flushed.

"Of course I shall, before others. Besides," she thoughtfully added, "I 'm used to a great deal of attention from Chad and Jim."

That annoyed him, as she had hoped it would do.

"Just the same," he said stiffly, "I think it should work both ways. If you exact attention, you ought to be willing to give it, if only as a sporting proposition."

"I suppose that's so. All right. I'll give you another cup of coffee if you like. Hot milk and three lumps of sugar, is n't it?"

"Two lumps, please, and the sugar in the cup first this time, if you don't mind. Then the hot milk on top of the sugar, and last of all the coffee."

She set down the coffee-pot and looked at him with concern.

"Heavens! I hope you're not going to be one of those fussy creatures I've heard about!"

"Every man is a fussy creature," this one affably assured her, helping himself to his fourth muffin as he spoke. (After all, she had eaten only two.) "So is every woman. The only difference between them is the kind of thing they fuss about. But I sha'n't ex-

pect you to pack my suit-case for me," he added kindly.

"It's lucky you won't," the lady muttered.

He finished his breakfast, with a contented grin. So far, at least, he felt, their verbal score was fairly even.

An hour later they left the hotel in a downpour which had set in to break yesterday's record. The warming memory of the coffee and bacon was fading, and there was a suggestion of the dark mask as Dorinda ran from the front door of the hotel to the waiting roadster. An impressive and slickered group of servants, generously tipped, lingered for the final small offices of wrapping rugs around the knees of the car's occupants and buttoning the rubber storm-curtains into place. From one of these, a chambermaid with whom Dorinda had established agreeable though transient relations, burst a spontaneous comment which they overheard.

"Look at the darlin's," she advised a fellow-worker. "Sure, they don't even know 't is rainin'!"

The darlin's looked at each other, and simultaneously exploded into unwilling laughter. The dark mask lifted, and Dorinda's comment, as they slithered through the slush half an hour later, proved that the entente still held.

"You do drive amazingly well," she volunteered, watching him with a critical eye. "You never take a chance, but you show perfect confidence and skill. How long have you driven?"

"Ever since I was old enough to get a license. I worked most of my way through the university, you know, by driving a jitney."

"Did you really? How interesting."

"It did n't seem very interesting at the time," he confessed. "I did station work mostly, at night, and it kept me up till all hours in every sort of weather. Naturally, I could n't study much, but I managed to scrape through, just as I'm scraping through to the bar. I'm not one of those brilliant students we read about, the kind that absorb education through their pores. We had a few of them at the university. I've always had to dig hard for what I got, and I've never had time to dig properly."

"You'd have time now, if you gave up your office work. Why don't you, and devote all your time to your law study?" she suddenly added.

It was the first reference she had made to their life together, and he gave serious thought to his answer, aware that he must say nothing to disturb the pleasant atmosphere developing between them. Already, though so young in his new rôle, he was learning to step warily.

"There are a lot of reasons," he told her. "One of the best is that Hatch, Fuller, and Kimball are our leading lawyers in town, and that association with them is an asset to a beginner. Also, it establishes a close personal relation with the members of the firm.

When I start out for myself they 'll throw some things my way—little things they don't want to bother with, of course—and that will help a lot."

"Judge Davis will help you too, won't he?"

"He says he will."

"You and he have been awfully good friends, have n't you? I know you went around with him a great deal."

"Yes. And I used to go there to dinner two or three times a week. But I have n't seen much of the judge for a couple of months." He turned to smile at her. "Busy elsewhere, you know."

"I don't want you to lose them," she mused aloud, "and I hope I'm not going to lose Norma. They can help us in every way, if they will."

"They 'll do it, all right. They're the salt of the earth."

He spoke more confidently than he felt. He had not liked Judge Davis's manner on the few recent occasions when they had met. It had held a reserve amounting to disapproval. David thought he knew what it meant. The judge believed that this protégé of his was about to ruin his life by an ill-advised marriage. Not being able to pass on this memory to Dorinda, he remained silent. He immensely liked and respected Judge Davis, and if the friendship were really ended he knew he would sorely miss it. Moreover, the canny and ambitious side of him, which the But-



terflies recognized and criticized, had been proud of that close relationship.

"It's odd how little you and I really know about each other," Dorinda murmured, taking a handkerchief from her coat pocket to wipe her features. The rubber curtains protected her to her chin, but, despite the glass shield, the rain dashed blindingly into her face. She wondered how Goddard could see to drive.

"You said something," he muttered, absently. After that, as if the remark had stimulated certain subconscious apprehensions, they both sank into depressed thought.

At Dalton, which they reached about five in the afternoon, life brightened agreeably. Entering the warm, palm-lined, and brilliantly lighted lobby of a good hotel, they almost collided with another couple coming toward them. The two men muttered apologies, then grasped hands with enthusiasm.

"Why, you old scout, what the dickens are you doing here?" the older man wanted to know. Seeing David's companion, his expression changed, and with a final slap and a quick "So long," he started after the lady with him, who had moved a few steps on. But David, grasping the situation, pursued him and caught his arm.

"Dick, I want you to meet my wife," he said urgently.

"Your wife?" Dick, a too-plump, blond man in his early thirties, with a round, smooth-shaven, good-humored face, and unexpectedly keen gray eyes, stared

mildly, first at David, and then at Dorinda in the background.

"Yes, we were married yesterday at Chester," David hurried on. "Did n't you read about it in the Grandon newspapers last night?"

"No, we left Grandon yesterday morning."

"So did we. This is luck! I want you and Alice to be the first to meet my wife."

For a fleeting instant Dick looked as if he were not quite sure that this was luck, and Alice, buoyantly pursued and brought back by David, seemed inclined to share his doubts. But they both recognized the beauty of the girl the bridegroom led forward, and there was a general and increasingly cordial shaking of hands. Dick and Alice Bradley had been married eight years, and while, as they expressed it, they "hit it off" very well, the first bloom of their original enthusiasm for each other had faded. They were gay persons, fond of their fellow-men and women, and increasingly addicted to good times. Though they were the acknowledged leaders of Grandon's younger Country-Club set, and though this set was given to a practice described as "hitting nothing but the high spots," no hint of scandal had ever rested on the Bradleys. Nor would it, for both had a basic caution that made them keep steadfast eyes on their reputations. The storm had driven them into the Walton Hotel for the night, and at heart they were inwardly appalled by the prospect of so long and unbroken an association. Their

manner warmed as the stimulating aspects of the present situation unrolled before them. Moreover, they genuinely liked Goddard.

"We've just got in and we're wet through," he unnecessarily explained when the first greetings were over, but—"this to Alice—"won't you and Dick dine with us here at seven?"

He saw the swift look the Bradleys exchanged, and the final appraising glances of the two women as Dorinda courteously supported her husband's invitation. Then his heart warmed over Alice Bradley's cordial response.

"We shall be delighted," she said heartily. "And after dinner perhaps we can have a rubber of bridge. In fact, David, I think you're saving my life," she added. "Dick and I have been alone together since yesterday morning, and I know he intended to strangle me as soon as we went upstairs. You can imagine what we were reduced to when I tell you that we have just been having tea in what the hotel manager calls 'the Persian room,' and listening to the noise made by his 'Tennessee Trio.'"

"A violin, harp, and piano, all out of tune," Dick gloomily contributed, "and every musician playing off the key as well. Promise me now you will never go in there," he urged Dorinda. "If I can feel that I've saved some one else from what we've gone through . . ."

"I promise," she smiled, and found herself liking

him. In the matter of his wife she withheld judgment.

In their upstairs sitting-room, with a fire already started, David faced her with shining eyes.

"Was n't that luck?" he jubilantly exclaimed. "Why, Alice Bradley can do a lot more for you than even Norma can. And her crowd," he added with a flash of insight, "won't bore you as much as Norma's will, when you get into it."

"She looks rather nice," Dorinda admitted.

"She is nice. She's one of the best."

"I've heard," Dorinda lightly mentioned, "that she can play a stiff game of tennis or flirt in a dark corner with equally good technique."

He flushed.

"Alice does n't deserve that. She's as straight as they make them. I suppose the remark came from your friend Bryant."

"Oh, no; Kitty made it. It seems that Mrs. Bradley tried to take up Kitty, two years ago, because of Kitty's music. But Kitty could n't stand being patronized. I don't think I can, either," she ended with a side glance at him. "I hope your friends will realize that."

When they went down to dinner at seven Dorinda was forced to admit that the Bradleys showed no desire to patronize her. They had decided that this chance encounter with the runaways was rather a lark, as well as what Dick called "a relief expedition" for

themselves, and they showed enough appreciation of their dinner and their companions to satisfy even a somewhat exacting hostess. For the first time in her life Dorinda exerted herself to meet social overtures half-way. She admired Mrs. Bradley's gown, which deserved the admiration, she talked more than usual, and she described the wedding in the little parsonage at Chester, drawing a picture of the parson's disapproving wife that made Dick roar.

"She was sorry for us both," Dorinda ended, "but she was more sorry for David than she was for me, and she was right. We had to motor almost a hundred and fifty miles through the rain and slush after that, and I was so disagreeable to him that he almost ditched me."

"I remembered just in time that she was young," David contributed, "and that perhaps I could improve her. But there was a moment of frightful peril when she began to fuss about her dog."

"I do miss Freckles," Dorinda confessed, and explained that Freckles was the first dog she had ever owned. The effect of the simple remark was electrical. The Bradleys were dog-lovers and the owners of noted kennels. They were willing to hear all about Freckles. Subsequently Mrs. Bradley discoursed on dogs till her husband stopped her.

"Alice knows more about dogs than any woman ought to know about anything," he admitted, "but of

course I know more than she does about everything. So I'll talk a while now."

The peak of the entente was reached thirty minutes later.

"If you'd like one of Gin Rickey's puppies as a playmate for Freckles," Alice offered, "you may have him. I'll give you your choice of the five as a wedding present."

"Love at first sight," Bradley told David in a stage whisper. "Those pups are the apples of her eye. I wouldn't be half as much surprised if she'd offered your wife one of the children."

If they could have talked indefinitely about dogs the splendor of the evening would have remained undimmed. But after dinner they adjourned to the Bradley's sitting-room for bridge, where, in the course of the next hour, a slight paling of the effulgence developed. Dorinda, whose game like her other social activities was only half a year old, was a nervous and self-conscious player. Through her blunders she and her partner, Bradley, lost rubber after rubber. She decided that she disliked cards, and was rapidly reaching the opinion that she disliked her fellow-players. The dark mask David had already begun to dread settled over her features. Bradley saw it, too.

"Too bad you don't play poker," he kindly suggested. "We might have better luck."

The dark mask lifted a trifle.



"I do play poker," Dorinda confessed. "I've played it a good deal lately. Why don't we try it? Anything would be better than this," she ended with the candor she had learned from the Butterflies.

The poker game began. In David's opinion it was far from an improvement on the bridge. For one thing, the stakes were too high. He himself rarely played poker, and he had never played for such stakes as this. Dorinda, it was revealed, had heretofore played exclusively for chips, but she showed a lively appreciation of the broadening interest lent to the game by the presence of bank-notes. At the end of the evening—a rather late end it turned out to be—David had lost sixty dollars. Though he took it smilingly, the loss depressed him to the soul. He could n't afford to throw away that money, but perhaps it was worth the lesson he had learned. It left a frightful hole in his bank-roll, as he discovered when he spread his remaining money out on his bed that night. Bradley had been congratulatory over his own assumption that neither side had really lost anything. If Bradley imagined, as he evidently did, that Mrs. David Goddard's success had counteracted David Goddard's losses, he had another guess coming. David undressed and grumpily went to bed, finding no consolation in the memory of his bride's bright face as she gleefully counted her winnings.

## CHAPTER X

**T**HANK God they were starting for Grandon to-day! The thought filled Dorinda's mind as she awoke Monday morning to a leaden-skied world in which rain had turned to icy sleet, and a freezing wind whimpered at the hotel windows. Two more days, only one more night on the road, and she would be back in the house she had been such a fool to leave. But the journey was worth while, if only because it had taught her how much she loved home. She did love it, though abysmally she wondered how she could, with those memories of her wretched childhood rolling over her like recurrent icy floods. Just the same, when she got past this experience, she would never want to leave home again. There was nothing here to remind her of home, except the noisy outcries of a young hen triumphantly proclaiming to the world from a neighboring poultry yard that she had laid an egg. She had n't, but it sounded well.

Dorinda stretched luxuriously. It must be rather late. They had not come upstairs till after midnight. She drew her watch from under her pillow and sleepily looked at its octagonal face. Ten o'clock! Startled, she rang the bell, and a willing maid responded with a

confidential grin. From the instant of her entrance she made it clear that the lady's tardiness did not surprise *her*. Under the look in her narrow eyes Dorinda flushed, telling herself she did not like this particular maid.

"I'm awfully late," she said, trying to speak naturally.

"Yes'm. Your husband left a message."

"Why . . . has he gone out?" For some reason, Dorinda was startled by this. The maid smiled again.

"Oh, no, ma'am," she said reassuringly. "Only down to 's breakfast. He waited in the sitting-room till half-past nine, and then, when he did n't hear no sound, he went down. Of course he did n't want to wake you. But he'll be back now any minute. Will you have your tray where you are, ma'am?"

"No, I'll get up and have breakfast in the sitting-room. Order it right away, please. I'll be ready by the time it's served. An omelet and grape-fruit and rolls and coffee."

She hurried into the bath-room as she spoke, and the sound of water running into the tub was mingled with the maid's voice at the telephone.

"I'd like a fire in the sitting-room," Dorinda called through the half-open door.

She dressed with almost frantic haste, overcome by her first consciousness of her peculiar relation to the young man who might appear any minute. He simply

must not appear till she was ready for him. It was the maid's knowing smile that made her think of such things; she increasingly disliked the maid.

But the maid's manner when she appeared half an hour later was all it should have been. She supplemented the waiter's efforts with the table, laid fresh logs on the fire, and, when there was nothing left for her to do, whisked out of the room in the detached manner of one whose thoughts were concerned with the imminent departure of parties in a suite across the hall.

Dorinda ate her breakfast with lingering deliberation. The food was good, the coffee excellent, the fire comforting. She dreaded the later plunge into the sleet-driven world, but she would not think of that yet. A brisk tap at the door roused her from an agreeable reverie. It was a tap she recognized, and with returning self-consciousness she gave permission to enter. That abominable maid! But one look at the cheerful young man who breezed into the room restored her poise. From his shining black hair to his equally brilliant shoes, he radiated unconsciousness and easy friendliness.

"Hello!" he said, swinging across the room with his characteristically quick stride, and dropping into a chair near the table; "the Bradleys left good-by for you."

"Have you seen them this morning?"

"I had breakfast with them. I got down just as they were going into the dining-room, so we naturally

joined forces. They left right after breakfast and I've just seen them off. They're going to try to make the run to Grandon to-day."

"Over two hundred miles in this going?" she cried.

"I know—it's a fool performance, if you ask me. But it's the kind of thing the Bradleys do. Of course they won't make it. Dick wants to get back to work. He had to come here on business Saturday and Alice said she came with him because she did n't know what else to do. She said she had thought of a lot of things since that she might have done instead," he added with a chuckle. "She said their meeting us was a Godsend. Both she and Dick said all sorts of nice things about you."

"Won't you have a cup of coffee?"

Dorinda made the offer to conceal her interest in those nice things. Would he have sense enough to repeat them? He had not. The offer of the coffee diverted his mind.

"Thanks, I think I will. I've had two, but I'm up to another while you're finishing yours."

"Did Mrs. Bradley pour yours nicely?" Dorinda asked, with a mocking smile.

"Beautifully. She's the kind of a woman God made especially to feed two starving men at breakfast. I told her so."

"Did she remember to put the sugar in first and then the hot milk?"

"Of course. She did that without being told. She

knows about such things," the wretched youth added, and wondered why his listener's manner grew cool.

Dorinda's next remark was the direct result of this slip, though neither of them knew it.

"If they can get home to-day, we can," she curtly announced. "Let's do it."

He shook his head.

"I would n't think of it. It's too much risk. It's a lot colder. The rain has turned to sleet, and the slush to sheets of ice. The roads could n't be worse."

"But I want to go. Please get the car ready, and I'll be down by the time you're at the entrance."

Their eyes met and held an instant. Then his jaw set and his face took on a shuttered look.

"I hope you're not in earnest," he said quietly, "for we can't do it."

"You mean you won't do it?"

"Well . . . yes. I'm sorry to refuse, but there's no earthly sense in attempting such a foolish thing."

"The Bradleys are doing it."

"That's their lookout. Besides, as I've already told you, they can't do it. They'll have to stop somewhere in a few hours at the most."

"If you're nervous, I'll drive."

He grinned.

"I'd be a whole lot more nervous if you drove," he cheerfully admitted. Suddenly he sat down the coffee-cup he had held during this brisk dialogue, and resting his elbows on the table leaned toward her.



"Come now," he said, good-humoredly, "let's be reasonable. I'd do it like a shot if there was anything to be gained by it—if you were ill or there was a surgeon to be taken anywhere, or any kind of help was needed."

"But simply to please me, you won't."

"I don't think it would please you," he patiently told her. "You'd have a beastly time, a nerve-racking strain. The Bradleys are idiots enough to try it because they are bored to death, but it's a crazy stunt. I've never gone in for that sort of thing," he added as she remained silent, "and, to be quite frank, I don't want to begin."

"All right," she said briskly. "Then I'll do it alone!"

He looked at her dubiously, not yet sure that she was serious.

"Dorinda," he said slowly, "sometimes you're so sensible, and again you're so foolish, that I simply can't make you out."

"You need n't try. In fact, you need n't take any trouble at all. You can go back in the train and I'll drive the roadster."

He forced her to meet his eyes.

"Have you thought how that would look? Can you realize that by this one action you would destroy all we've done and are hoping to do?"

Her eyes fell, and for a moment she hesitated. He pushed what he fancied was his advantage.

"Be reasonable," he begged again. "Don't wreck our whole future for a childish impulse."

He had chosen his words unwisely. Her gray-green eyes grew colder.

"I married you," she said remotely, "for just one reason—to be my own mistress and do as I please. Before two days have passed you're trying to order me around . . . and . . . I . . . simply . . . won't . . . have . . . it!"

"I'm not ordering. I'm arguing and begging," he reminded her. Then he made his biggest mistake.

"Besides, your driving is n't up to such a trip!" he pointed out.

"Is n't it? I'll show you!"

He passed a palm over his shining hair, with an effect of desperation.

"You'll kill yourself. Good God, Dorinda! have you gone crazy? Kill our plans, if you want to, but don't throw away your life, too."

She rose.

"You can do exactly as you please," she said quietly. "I shall drive back to Grandon to-day."

He stood up, also, and for a moment they faced each other, hot-eyed and breathless. He had an odd feeling that a tangible and crushing weight was settling on his shoulders, but when he spoke it was in his usual manner.

"All right," he said. "If you're determined, I'll go with you."

She stared at him, unable for a moment to take in the fact of her victory.

"Do you mean it?" she asked at last. "You said you would n't."

"I know. I was wrong. Of course I'll go, if you go."

She decided that she understood.

"I believe it's a trick," she cried. "You think I'll meet one capitulation with another. Well, I won't, and that's flat."

"It is n't a trick," he said wearily. "I'm ready to go any time you want to start. I'll pack my suit-case and be at the door when you're ready."

"Very well, then. In twenty minutes."

At the door he stopped and looked back at her.

"It would be hard to forgive this sort of thing," he deliberately told her, "if one did n't remember what your life has been. I'm going to try to make things better for you after this; and by God," he added with sudden passion, but on the same pitch of voice, "I'm not going to let you upset everything within forty-eight hours of the start. One of us has got to have self-control! If it's up to me to furnish it all, I'll try to do it."

The door closed and he was gone.

Dorinda went into her bedroom and began to throw garments into her suit-case, trying by action to stifle the clamoring voices within her. The episode had been as much of a revelation to her as it was to him.

She had not dreamed she had in her such possibilities of unreasonable tyranny, and waves of humiliation rolled over her. It was her wretched temper, of course. She had always known she had an ungovernable temper, and of late she had been giving it full scope. She told herself she would have given everything she possessed to wipe out the last half-hour. But it could not be wiped out. It could never be wiped out. She would always remember it, always know henceforth that she was the kind of person who did this sort of thing. Goddard would remember it, too; but this did not matter so much. The loss of her own self-respect was the serious element in the episode.

As she packed, more quietly now, she debated what she could do. Drop the journey? Say she was wrong, as he had done? No. That would put her in an impossible position. Better start, as they now planned, and when a few hours of struggle with conditions showed them how impossible progress was, capitulate as gracefully as she could. That would be easier; better in every way. She finished the packing, rang for a porter, and accompanied this laden functionary to the hotel entrance in so tangible a condition of gloom that he stared at her curiously.

David was standing beside the roadster; and as he helped her into it—an attention she usually anticipated by springing into her own seat—she cast a swift glance at him. No signs of their recent conflict appeared in his face, and it retained its serenity even when she took

her place behind the wheel. To herself she admitted that this action was rubbing it in a bit, but, on the other hand, it would make surrender easier later on. Her confession of the unwisdom of proceeding would be strengthened by the fact that she and not he was the driver. Incidentally, she admired his self-control. He was acting amazingly well. As for her, a fresh wave of self-disgust broke over her.

David meanwhile looked at the glistening expanse of ice that represented the road and his face grew very sober.

"Do you really want to drive?" he asked as he took his seat beside her.

"Yes."

That was sufficiently definite and he took it in silence. Dorinda started the roadster with no visible indication of the emotion that increasingly filled her. It was a new emotion and a most disturbing one, for it was the emotion of fear. Once, as the roadster emerged from an ice rut to pass a slow-moving truck, the little car skidded round a complete circle. The driver made a good recovery, but the incident shook her nerves. Two hours later, rounding an unexpectedly sharp turn while ascending a hill, the car again slipped out of control for half a second. Dorinda felt David's hand slide into the right side pocket of her driving-coat and take out her cigarette-case and match-box. He lit a cigarette and restored the borrowed articles to the pocket. It was the first time she had seen him smoke,

although he had admitted that he liked an occasional pipe.

"Nervous?" she asked, with a provoking smile.

"Who would n't be? But you're driving awfully well."

That softened her and she spoke impulsively.

"You were perfectly right. We ought n't to be doing this. We'll stop when we get to Adneyport. Or shall we turn back?"

"I was sure you would admit the difficulties after we started. We'll probably find the Bradleys at Adneyport, too. There's a good hotel there, the only one this side of Carlisle, so I suppose we'd better keep on without stopping anywhere for lunch. We're not far from Adneyport—thirty miles, I'd say."

Her driving deserved his praise, and the praise helped the driving by strengthening her morale. She proceeded with the utmost care and with surprisingly good judgment, but within an hour she had another skid—this one perilously near a ditch. When the roadster had straightened itself out, she turned to David.

"You may drive, if you like."

"Would you rather I did?" He asked the question naturally enough, but she saw his look of relief and stiffened.

"No, I'd rather see this thing through. I like to finish what I've started. But I know I owe it to you to let you drive, if you want to."

He was leaning forward, ready for the exchange of



seats, but at this he again dropped back decisively.

"No, finish the job," he said lightly. "That's just the way I should feel about it. Besides, I could n't do any better than you're doing."

She laughed, rather shakily.

"That's true greatness of soul. You're pouring so many coals of fire on my head that I shall not have a hair left."

After that she gave all her attention to the driving. They were now on a stretch of narrow country road, along which ran the two deep and hard-frozen ruts of a single track. At their right lay a shallow ravine. The approach of another car was always a menace, necessitating the struggle of both cars out of the icy ruts and over to a side of the narrow road to allow passing. By the mercy of Heaven, Dorinda grimly reflected, they were meeting very few cars. Not many human beings were as idiotic as she was.

Even as the thought came, a big sedan swung out from a blind road less than fifty feet ahead and rushed toward her. Her heart dropped a beat and she heard David's low exclamation. She swerved out of the rut, sounding the horn. There was a squealing of the sedan's brakes, a glimpse of its driver frantically sawing his wheel as the big car, now plainly out of control, reeled toward the roadster. She brought down her foot brake, felt a terrific impact . . .

From some other world, black and terrible and full of agony, she heard the sound of shrieks. . . .

## CHAPTER XI

A VOICE, vaguely familiar, was in her ear. A face, vaguely familiar, hung somewhere in the space above her. Simultaneously another picture swung before her—an icy road, a reeling automobile . . .

The voice spoke:

"You feel better, don't you?"

"I . . . think . . . so. What . . . happened?"

"An accident. You were hurt, but you'll be all right soon."

"D-David!"

"He's all right," the voice said understandingly. "He was hurt, too, but he'll soon be around again."

Dorinda stared into the friendly, reassuring face, and then at the whitewashed walls of a bare little room. She discovered that she could not move her head—only her eyes.

"Where . . . am . . . I?"

"In the Adneyport Hospital. Fortunately, you were only twelve miles away from it. Everything is being done for you and Mr. Goddard. He's in the next room. Now I've answered all your questions, so your mind would be at rest, but you must n't talk any more. You know who I am, don't you?"

"I . . . know . . . I . . . ought . . . to . . ."

"Alice Bradley. Dick and I were at the Adneyport Hotel. David telephoned there on a chance of finding us."

"What's . . . the . . . matter . . . with . . . David?"

"Only a broken arm and a couple of broken ribs."

The speaker's tone implied that such injuries were the merest trifles. "He's walking around his room already, yelping to come in and see you."

The look in the listener's eyes moved her and she hurried on. Better banish that dread, even though she disobeyed the doctor's orders by talking.

"By the way, David's the hero of the occasion," she said. "None of the others could move,—for the time,—" she hastily interpolated, "but David got across a big field to the nearest farm-house and telephoned for doctors and ambulances. No one knows how he did it, but he did."

"Were . . . the . . . others . . . badly . . . hurt?"

"The ambulances had to bring you all to Adneyport. Now we mustn't say any more. I have talked too much as it is, but I felt I had to reassure you. Shut your eyes and try to sleep."

A white-capped nurse came forward and supplemented this order with a salty liquid, administered through a glass tube. The next time Dorinda awoke a soft night light was burning in the little room and two figures were standing near the bed, a nurse and obviously a doctor, for he turned, as if subconsciously

warned of her observation, and came to the bed to bend solicitously above her.

"Keep quiet," he urged. "No questions this time. Everything's all right, and you're both doing splendidly."

"You're . . . sure . . . David . . ."

"Your husband's condition is fine, just as yours is. He will be in to see you in a day or two, if you're good."

After that nothing else seemed to matter. The dim night light grew dimmer and finally faded out.

The darkness lasted a long time. There were ice-packs on her head and face; and hushed voices, and much handling, and the smell of medicine. At last Mrs. Bradley's cheerful voice again and her reassuring smile. This time Dorinda faintly returned the smile.

"What time is it?" she asked, more naturally than she had yet spoken.

Mrs. Bradley glanced at her wrist-watch.

"Five o'clock."

"Oh . . . then it's about four hours since the accident?"

Mrs. Bradley smiled.

"My dear child, it's nearer four days since the accident. That was Monday and this is Friday."

"You're . . . joking!"

"No, I'm not. You've been kept very quiet. You had a lot of bromide and slept most of the time."

"And David?"

"David is flourishing like a green bay-tree. He has the strength of a horse. He will be in to see you as soon as you're up to it."

"I'm up to it now. I want to be *sure* I did n't kill him!"

Her new friend laughed. The sound was the most comforting Dorinda had ever heard.

"You did n't kill him," she buoyantly testified. "I'll swear to that. But it's for the doctor to say when you can see him. I don't think it will be to-night."

"But I feel quite natural."

"That's good, but they don't want any excitement for you."

A belated realization struck the patient.

"Have you been here ever since Monday?"

"Yes, of course."

"But . . . how could you?"

"We were on the spot, and naturally I wanted to see you through. Besides, there was n't any one else to come. Dick left Tuesday morning. He had to. Now that you're all right, I'll go back to-morrow."

"You've been wonderful. I won't try to thank you."

Dorinda took the other's hand in hers and kissed it. It was a finely capable hand, used to holding golf-clubs, tennis-rackets, and the wheels of motors. The caress was the first of the sort Dorinda had ever given to any one, and she felt shy and self-conscious; but Alice Bradley looked down at her with her good-humored

smile and with the air of one used to having her hand kissed by grateful acquaintances. In her heart, however, young Mrs. Bradley felt guilty, for she had chafed inwardly and hotly against four days of confinement in a country hospital. She could not turn her back on the stricken and helpless pair, but it was hard to sacrifice her accustomed ease and comfort for this period of Good-Samaritan service. She had remained, and she was very glad she had done so; but she was restive under praise.

The doctor—his name was now revealed as Parker—breezed in, beaming, congratulatory. He was a big man, gray-eyed, smooth-faced, bald-headed, with an amazingly light step and an equally amazing volume of tone. His way of cheering his patients was to greet them in a loud and exuberant voice. Quite frequently he could be heard addressing the nurses in the same voice as he entered the hospital's front door. The noise was supposed to broadcast the glad news of his arrival, and to fill his patients with hope and "pep." It did not always have this effect on nervous sufferers. But Parker was a good sort, efficiently meeting his daily dozens of duties as they came before him. He had subdued his voice in earlier visits to this victim of shock and concussion, but he now sent it forth in ringing tones.

"Well, well, well! we're doing splendidly!" he shouted. "We're awake, and cool as a cucumber. Almost ready for another smash-up," he blithely added,



as he gave his thermometer a casual flick and inserted it under the patient's tongue. Having thus reduced her to speechlessness, he laid a finger on her pulse, took out his watch and gazed at it.

"She wants to see her husband, Doctor," Mrs. Bradley suggested from her post of modest retirement beside the window.

"She can, soon."

"How soon?—to-night?"

Dorinda reflected again that Mrs. Bradley was a wonder. She was putting into words the thought that vainly prompted the patient's helpless tongue.

"No, not to-night," said Parker, whose gaze at the watch was becoming reproachful. "It's too late. I want her to have a good sleep. Besides, her pulse is a trifle jumpy."

"She seems to think we're keeping him away from her because he is n't able to come. In fact," Mrs. Bradley added, "she says she wants to see him so she can be sure she did n't kill him."

"Of course she did n't kill him, or any one else," the doctor said, absent-mindedly. That pulse was certainly not to his liking, and he always inwardly blamed the patient for any such condition. "That chauffeur killed himself and that woman by his fool recklessness," he continued, his thoughts on the pulse, but talking from force of habit. "From all accounts, he shot around a blind turn at forty miles an hour. He told one of his

passengers just before the collision that it was safer to drive fast on such a road—that the car handled better. Well, he handled it, all right!”

The graying pallor of his patient’s face, at this point, checked the winged speech of one of the kindest and least tactful men in the medical profession. He hurriedly removed the thermometer and regarded it sternly.

“Doctor,” Dorinda gasped, “do you mean that two persons were killed in that accident!”

She heard confused words: “. . . thought of course you knew . . . not your fault . . . no blame whatever attaches to you . . . every one admits that . . .” Then, for a time, she heard nothing more.

When she revived, Doctor Parker was wearing the chastened expression of a recently chastised school-boy, but he grumbled at her robustly.

“See here, how are you going to get well if you keep on doing this sort of thing?” he wanted to know. “I promised your husband to have you ready to be sent home in a few days more, if you behaved yourself; and look at you!”

“I want to see him,” Dorinda gulped. “I want to know just what I did to him.”

“Oh, all right, if that’s the way you feel about it,” Parker conceded. To Mrs. Bradley he added: “It will do her less harm to see him than to get her imagination over-stimulated. He is n’t far away,” he as-

sured Dorinda. "Hey, there, where's that nurse? Taking a walk? Confound 'em; they're always taking a walk! You'd think the staff of this hospital was training for an endurance hike." He strode through the adjoining bath-room and into a connecting room on the other side, and she heard his voice booming on:

"Here, young man, stir yourself and get ready to make a call. Your wife wants to see you. Only five minutes this first time, remember—just long enough for her to be sure you're a good insurance risk. If you both act pretty, we'll let you have lunch with her to-morrow. Steady now! That's the boy!"

The next moment David shuffled into the room, wearing hospital slippers, the gay red bath-robe, and his widest grin. Something about that grin brought a lump to Dorinda's throat.

Under the eyes of the doctor and Mrs. Bradley, David approached the bed. His left arm was in a sling, and he walked with a stiffness not wholly explained by the flopping slippers. He bent over the bed, laid his right hand on Dorinda's shoulder, and for a moment rested his cheek against hers. She understood. This was grand-stand play, for the benefit of the two spectators. Then he straightened, drew a deep breath, and smiled down at her.

"The worst of it's over," he said robustly, "and

we're set for home. The doctor thinks we'll be able to travel by Monday, in a couple of state-rooms, with a nurse along to look after us."

"How far are we from home now?" It was n't at all what she had meant to say, but it seemed the only speech that would pass her dry lips.

"About a hundred and thirty miles."

"It seems a million."

"I know."

Parker pushed a chair toward him and David sat down, took the hand that lay on her breast, and held it as he talked on:

"But we must try to be patient. We've got a whole lot to be grateful for."

"I know; I might have killed you."

"My dear girl," he spoke almost sternly, "get such nonsense out of your head! There's absolutely no blame for you in this accident."

"I told her that," Doctor Parker boomed. "We'll show her the newspapers to-morrow if she does n't believe it."

"I guess we won't do that. She'll have to take our word for it," David smiled.

"Oh, I'm not morbid enough to think I'm responsible for the collision. I suppose no one could have got out of the way, with all that ice and the ditch there. But if I had n't insisted on starting—"

"Forget it! Such talk is just as morbid as the other.

Promise me you will try to drop the whole thing from your mind."

"I'll try . . . but how can I?" The bobbed and bandaged head moved restlessly on the pillow. "I see that terrible car all the time . . . coming toward us . . ."

"I'm going to forget it, and if I can, you can. Fasten your mind on something else. To-morrow, they say, you can sit up, and we'll play checkers or jackstraws."

"Time's up!" Parker approached them peremptorily. "Kiss her good night and get out, young man. You're a mighty lucky pair, if you ask me."

David kissed her good night—that is, his cheek again rested lightly against hers, and to both observers the caress seemed more eloquent than the more conventional one would have been. Dorinda closed her eyes and set her jaws. She wanted to cry, but that condition was not significant. She could have cried over anything and everything just now. But when the gay red bath-robe had vanquished through the door she felt increasingly forlorn and lonely. She was glad Alice Bradley was there, glad when the nurse returned from her walk, even glad when Doctor Parker, having bidden her a boisterous good night, dropped in again an hour later to do it all over before he left the hospital. Incidentally he was moved to utter a tribute to Goddard:

"That husband of yours is a pippin. But I guess

it does n't surprise you much to be told that," he added with a knowing look. "You'll appreciate him some day when you hear the whole story of this business."

Dorinda murmured faintly that she appreciated him now, and subconsciously recalled George Eliot's remark about the strain put on the affections by a different taste in jokes. Though she had insisted that she was not morbid, morbid fancies filled her mind. She even resented the discovery of her own returning strength. What right had she to get off almost scot-free, when two victims of the accident were in their graves?—she who, however clear she might be of responsibility for the actual collision, had at least caused the accident by being in a certain spot at an instant when there was every reason why she should have remained eighty miles away from it.

The next morning she decided that, after all, she had not got off as easily as she had thought. She was to sit up for the first time, and her husband was graciously permitted to come in and eat luncheon with her. To the nurse and Doctor Parker the occasion seemed one for boisterous rejoicing, and though she was still in an abyss of depression Dorinda was loyally trying to play up to this conception. For some reason, to which she had attached no importance, she had not been permitted to look into a mirror. Now, as the final stages of her toilet approached, she abruptly demanded one. The nurse put on an expression of elaborate unconcern.

"There does n't seem to be a hand-glass around," she said, with a roving eye. "But you don't need one. There isn't much variety in the way of arranging bobbed curly hair, is there? You're mighty lucky to have hair that curls naturally," she earnestly expounded. "I've learned lately that bobbed hair which has to be artificially waved is more of a nuisance to the wearer than any other kind."

Her patient refused to be drawn into an abstract discussion on bobbed hair.

"I wish you would get me my hand-glass," she persisted. "It must be somewhere in my luggage." As she caught the expression on the nurse's face her voice sharpened. "Good Heavens!" she cried; "am I disfigured? Is that what all those bandages and ice-packs meant?"

"No, no, nothing like it," the nurse hastened to assure her. "Mrs. Goddard, you simply must not let yourself get so excited over everything that comes up. There's no real disfigurement and no danger of any, but—"

Mrs. David Goddard abruptly changed from a reasonable patient to a too young person who attached immense importance to having her own way.

"Please get my hand-glass," she said. "I insist on seeing how I look."

"I'll get it," Miss Dunbar agreed, "but first I must tell you the conditions. You don't look natural, and you won't for a few days longer, because there has



been a great deal of congestion and it has settled in your face. It's getting better every day, and it will all be gone in another week or so. But there's no denying that at present it would be hard to tell you and little Topsy apart. I'm explaining this so you won't be worried when you see yourself. There's absolutely nothing to be disturbed about. Now, if I get the mirror, will you remember that you look a hundred times worse than you are?"

"I'll try to."

When the mirror came, Dorinda looked into it and received the shock of a sudden heart-drop. Unwarned, she would not have known that these black and swollen features were her own. She threw down the mirror.

"I don't want to see any one. I won't see any one."

"Your husband has seen you already, you know," Miss Dunbar reminded her, with nice insight. "So now the first shock is over for you both. He's all ready to come in, and straining at the leash. You'd better carry out your program."

That was wisdom and Dorinda permitted herself to be injected into the flame-colored kimono, but her expression when David entered again, in the glory of the red bath-robe, was distinctly sulky.

"I call this rubbing it in," she muttered as he greeted her with a cheerful "hello!" and dropped into his chair at the table with successful casualness. "I've no right to expect you to face me and eat at the same time."

"I could show you a color scheme up and down

my left side that beats yours to a frazzle," David assured her, as he passed the toast. "You're just a nice, ordinary coffee-color. I'm blue and green and yellow in rich mass effects. But I'm all done up in plaster now, so don't ask to see it," he added with a debonair smile.

He made no reference to the broken arm in its sling, and neither did she; but as the luncheon proceeded she observed how easily he surmounted the handicap of that useless member. The nurse unostentatiously cut his cold chicken, and this service was the only episode that rubbed in his limitations.

"Too bad Alice has to go back to-day," he began; "you'll miss her a lot. Has n't she been a trump?"

"I'll never forget it," Dorinda confessed. "She has given me a post-graduate course in tact and efficiency, too."

"I wish she could stay long enough to give one to Parker," David commented, looking around to be sure the nurse was out of the room. "Of all the well-meaning asses in the State, he's about the worst. He ought to be muzzled on the threshold of every sick-room. However, he has been mighty good to us, as they all have, and I dare say we shall feel quite sentimental when we leave next Monday. By the way, I had an awfully decent telegram from Hatch the night of the accident," he went on, with a growing sense of difficulty in keeping up the monologue. "He wired sympathy and suggested wiring money, too, which I

let him do. He even suggested coming here himself, to look after us. Would n't he have hated doing it, if we had consented!" he chuckled. "I'll bet it was the relief of his life when I wired him that Alice Bradley was here."

"She must have hated it just about as much as he would," Dorinda suggested. "Even if she does pour coffee better, she is n't naturally any more of a ministering angel than I am; but of course her manner is always perfect. I never knew any one who was so certain to say and do exactly the right thing in any conditions, but my experience is n't extensive. I suppose there are lots of women like her."

"Not many. She's unique."

"It is n't as if I were a friend of hers, either—"

"You will be; or, rather, you are now. I think she has shown that."

Dorinda shook her bobbed head.

"No, she has just shown her thoroughbred quality. She'd have done as much for any one. I shall be grateful to her all my life, but I have no idea of imposing on her or assuming too much as a result of this."

Goddard looked at her thoughtfully. He could not do that without a pang over the black and swollen face, which, as the nurse had said, looked so much worse than it was. He had mercifully kept his eyes away from it during the luncheon.

"I think you'll find she will make the first advances," he said gravely. "I've known her ever since I came

to Grandon, and I've got a lot of faith in her—more than ever, naturally, these last few days."

The luncheon was over. Despite their efforts, it had been rather stiff, and both of them realized it. Dorinda abruptly leaned toward him.

"David," she said, "I don't want to say much, because if I do I'm afraid I'll cry. I've learned what nerves are, lately, and I don't want to encourage the beastly things. But I know I ought to tell you this: I've learned a lesson I shall never forget."

He put his brown hand on hers.

"Don't think any more about it than you can help," he advised. "We're both going to make a fresh start on a clean slate. Now let's snap into some sort of a game. I sent out for a couple of packs of cards. What shall it be? Double solitaire? Fan-tan? Desperation?"

"Desperation sounds more appropriate," Dorinda said depressedly.

But the game did not last long. In the midst of it Mrs. Bradley came in to say good-by.

"It's mighty tactful of you two to do this," was her greeting, as she paused to enjoy the tableau from the threshold. "It makes me feel so much less guilty about leaving you."

"You're the world's best angel," David affectionately told her, "and you never fail to live up to the rôle. Some Sunday morning I'll come over and spend the day telling you what I think of you."

"I hope he'll do it for us both," Dorinda said in a voice that failed on the words. "You see, I can't. I've suddenly become a person that bursts into tears when kind friends look at her, so I won't say another word."

Alice Bradley bent and lightly kissed a discolored cheek.

"Sometime we'll laugh over all this together," she predicted, and kissed David's firm jaw-bone as well.

"He's the kind one can kiss," she airily explained to Dorinda, as she crossed the threshold. "He's the Husband's Reliance and the Wife's White Knight."

Closing the door after her, Goddard reflected that for once Alice Bradley was lacking in her usual tact. No young man, however Galahadian he may be, is really gratified by such a tribute. This one returned rather reluctantly to Dorinda and the waiting game. For the moment both patients were depressed by the departure of Alice Bradley's buoyant personality, and the coming two days stretched before them like an endless gray road. The unconscious sigh with which he gathered up his cards was consciously echoed by his companion.

"Is n't it awful?" she dolefully brought out. "I've never been so homesick in my life."

"It is n't pleasant, but I suppose we ought to be grateful that we are not laid up for weeks or months."

"It makes me feel simply desperate," she admitted, from the depths of her black boredom. "When I

think of home and of my comfortable rooms, and of two days more here, I feel like wrecking the hospital."

David thought of his third floor back and a wave of longing swept over him. Then he remembered that even if he were starting for Grandon within the hour he could not return to that familiar room, and the pang he experienced made him wince.

Before he could speak there was a clatter of heels along the polished floor of the outer hall, mingled with the sound of familiar voices, the excited yapping of a puppy, and a throaty contralto laugh. With a brief tap the door flew open and the Triumvirate burst upon them.

"They said, 'Go right in,'" Chad exclaimed, as usual acting as spokesman for the crowd, "so we did." With a wide swing of the leash he sent Freckles into the lap of his mistress, from which refuge the puppy frantically licked her congested face.

"Gee whiz, Dorry," he went on, "we're glad to see you up and doing! Say . . . come . . . come, now; hold on, old girl . . . there . . ."

He was staggering under the sudden impact of his hostess. Rising from her chair and dislodging the puppy, Dorinda had first given her unexpected visitors a wild, ecstatic, incredulous survey, and then hurled herself into Chad's arms, sobbing hysterically.

"Oh, you darlings!" she choked. "You blessed, blessed angels! How did you know that I was simply



dying for a sight of you—and that I was so homesick I was ready to cut my throat!”

Even Chad seemed to feel that as a greeting this was exceeding normal hospitality. He patted her back, while David self-consciously responded to the overtures of Freckles.

“Coming from a bride of less than a week, that statement seems a little extreme,” Chad reminded her. “We’ll file it for future reference. In the meantime, Dorry dear, if you’re through with my chest I can use it again. I want to dry it out. Jim will give you his for a few minutes, and Kitty has something she thinks is a breast, though, personally and strictly between us, I’ve always doubted it. Hello! here’s Davy, too, with his halo not even jolted to one side by the accident! But I do want to say, Goddard, as man to man, that this map of Dorry’s looks infernally suspicious to me. I suppose you will say the car fell on her face; but in my opinion nothing but a strong pair of manly and determined fists could have made any girl look like that.”

As he talked Chad passed Dorinda to Kitty, shook hands with David, and dropped on to the freshly made hospital bed with a sigh of deep content. Like the other two, he was incredibly grimy and his clothes looked as if he had slept in them. Kitty took up the simple annals of their journey.

“Do you realize, Dorry,” she asked in her husky



voice, "that we, your faithful little friends, have been in a dingy day-coach since five o'clock? We have. We read in 'The Record' last night that Mrs. Bradley was leaving you to-day, so we left in the blue dawn this morning; and the blue dawn had nothing on us after the first thirty minutes, especially as we had stayed up all night to make sure we'd start. If we could have got out and walked back we'd have done it, but once the train really got under way it bumped along for two hours without stopping."

"We had nothing to eat," Bryant carried on. "There was no dining-car on the train. So Chad stole two oranges from a baby in the seat behind us, and I took refreshing drafts from the water-cooler at intervals, and if Kitty had n't brought a flask I don't know what would have become of us. As it is—is n't there some food waiting for this relief expedition?"

Dorinda paused in her occupation of kissing Kitty, an attention Kitty received with an infant's air of calm detachment, and kissed Jim with equal enthusiasm. Then she took her handkerchief and dried her eyes, talking with catching breaths, like those of a child exhausted by long crying.

"Of course there is," she gulped. "David, ring the bell. The nurse has gone for her lunch, leaving us to take care of each other, but I'm sure we can find an orderly or some one else who will feed you."

When the orderly came Chad greeted him before Dorinda could speak.

"James," he said cordially, rising to a sitting position on the bed, "we are three of Mrs. Goddard's dear friends, who have flown to her side in her hour of trial. Later on we are going to be a great comfort to her, but just now our systems are weakened by lack of nourishment. Do you think you could get us some grouse and plovers' eggs, and a little old port or something of the sort, and do it briskly?"

James grinned, glancing from face to face of the circle before him. Mrs. Goddard's friends were a weird-looking bunch, all right, but she and her husband seemed willing to stand for them, though the bridegroom did n't look exactly happy. In fact, though they were all making a lot of noise, James was convinced that the only really happy member of the party was the puppy.

"It's after lunch-time for visitors—" he began.

"Of course it is," Chad heartily agreed. "That's why a bright, upstanding young chap like you is willing to give the silly rules one in the eye and rise to an emergency. Any one can get food at lunch-time. It's the lad who can storm the larder between meals we're looking for, and something tells me we have found him. Hurry up, old man, and minister to us before we perish. What was on the luncheon menu to-day?"

"Cold chicken—" James remembered.

"Ah!" Chad sighed ecstatically. "James, you interest me strangely. What else?"

"Lettuce—"

"Not so good. I prithee, James, do better."

"Apple-pie—"

Chad got off the bed.

"Say no more, but lead us to the pie, and that right quickly. We'll take the pup, too. He needs a drink and a bath and a square meal and a lot of other things." He seized the leash, dragged the unwilling puppy to the door, and, with a sweeping gesture, directed his associates to precede him into the hall. "When we return, Dorinda," he called from the threshold, "we will inquire into your condition and listen to a few of your symptoms; not to many of them, however, unless the luncheon is better than we have reason to believe it will be. For the moment, farewell. Onward, Freckles! Forward, James!"

He followed his friends into the hall, closing the door after him. Left alone, Dorinda and David looked at each other, she exultantly, he with a dark steadiness that carried his message to her.

"It was good of them to come, was n't it?" she said at last. "But I see you don't like it. Do you really mind, very much?"

"Not if you will send them over to the hotel and keep them there most of the time."

She stiffened.

"Naturally, the hotel will be their headquarters.

But I hope you won't object to my having them here to cheer me up. The Lord knows I need them!" she passionately added.

"I know I have no right to object to anything you or your friends do," David admitted, turning from her to stare out of the window as he spoke. "But, on the other hand, you ought to realize what a disreputable-looking lot those three are, and what will be said about them." He ended with the thought that was filling his mind. "Thank Heavens, Alice was out of the way before they came!"

"That is lucky," Dorinda icily agreed. "However, they are my guests, not yours, so you needn't see any more of them than you care to, or feel under any obligations to entertain them."

"That's understood, of course." He started toward the connecting door, but suddenly wheeled to face her.

"Dorinda," he said, desperately, "don't you see how this is going to look, and what a lot of talk it will make, and how it's going to hurt us?"

As if something in his voice had touched her, she softened.

"I suppose they will be criticized," she admitted. "They always are, wherever they go. But there's no sense in blaming me because they came. Their appearance was as big a surprise to me as it was to you."

"That's so . . . I know. But . . . the point is . . . you liked having them come. You're glad they

came! Things come along that shoot all our plans to pieces and . . . somehow . . . we look at them from exactly opposite angles. That's the discouraging part of this business. They are things that affect us both, things we've both got to take the consequences of, but you seem to have no sense of responsibility about them—"

He stopped and went on in a different tone.

"However, probably I'm getting stirred up over nothing—"

"It's a habit you have," she icily informed him.

"If that's so, I've got to get over it," he said, good-humoredly. "But you don't think they're planning to stay, do you? This place will bore them to death. They'll get off to-night or to-morrow, won't they?"

She crossed the room to face him.

"I don't know what their plans are," she said slowly. "Probably they have n't any. They never have. But you may as well understand that I want them here, that I am glad they came, as you have just pointed out, and that I'll keep them here as long as I can."

For a moment the two pairs of eyes held. Then Goddard laughed rather shakily.

"Well, that's that," he said, and went over to the window to stare out of it again, his free hand clenched tight in the pocket of the gay red bath-robe. She waited till he turned and faced her.

"When you and I made our bargain, Dorinda," he reminded her, speaking very slowly, "you told me you

were leaving a lot of things unsaid, trusting them to my honor. Did n't you?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well, I was leaving things unsaid, too. I was trusting certain things to your honor. I was counting on you to play the game, and not to put me in these hellish positions."

"It was distinctly understood," she reminded him, "that I was to choose my own friends and lead my life."

"It was distinctly understood," he pointed out, "that there was to be a new deal, that you were marrying me to improve conditions and not to make them worse. I suppose it won't interest you, but . . . the cold truth is that you're not playing the game. You have n't played it for one moment since we were married. Your idea seems to be to do anything you want to do, and then apologize for it, and in the next minute or the next day do something else as bad or worse. Last night you said you had learned a lesson. You had n't. I'd as lieve have another collision as have that bunch here. They're just as dangerous, in their way. They'll give us a black eye we'll never get over. The news of them and their fool stunts will go back to Grandon and be waiting for us when we get home. A nice drive-off we'll have from the matrimonial tee after this!" he ended bitterly.

"Is that all?"

"No," he said wearily. "But I won't say anything

more. What 's the use? It does n't even impress you to know that you have n't got the first glimmering of a sense of decency, or honor, or fair play."

The connecting door slammed behind him as he passed through it, and Dorinda stood where he had left her, staring at the blank white wall, while an uprush of rage surged over her. So that was his chivalry! All he was thinking about was his side of things—his interests, his peace of mind, his standing, his career. These things were all he had thought of from the first. His talk of making life easier for her was just an uprush of meaningless words. Their life together was to hold constant interference from him. He had been right about the journey and she had admitted it—a fatal mistake. He was wrong about this and he must be taught that he was. He was a spoiled, intolerant, narrow-minded prig. He was all the Butterflies said he was. He had told her what he thought of her. Well, it was high time she told him what she thought of him, and now she was prepared to do it.

The door opened and the bunch pushed one another into the little room, jostling and shouting as to the proper handling of burdens each carried.

"It's going to be a buffet lunch," Chad explained. "James led us to the cook, and she let us take what was left in the larder—which was n't much. But it will hold us till dinner-time. Look out for the milk,



Jim! Kitty, if you drop that salad I'll scalp you. Here, put everything on the table."

"And while we eat, Dorinda," Jim interrupted, pushing the cards off the table with a sweep of the elbow and setting there the plates he carried, "you have our ears. Come children, spread out all the food and be fair about it."

"And remember," Kitty said, "that I am a lady, so I need most of the chicken."

"You're not enough of a lady for that," Chad assured her, helping himself to a leg and a wing.

"What's the matter, Dorry?" Jim asked. "Are you really crying again?"

Chad turned from the table and looked at their hostess.

"Of course she's crying," he announced. "Why wouldn't she cry? I'll wager a dollar to a doughnut her model young man has been raising Cain because we came here. He's perfectly right, too. I knew from the first that it was an idiotic performance. Say the word, Dorry, and we'll leave again on the next train, with or without our chicken."

Dorinda caught his hand and held it. For the moment, it seemed to her the one firm support in a reeling world.

"Don't you dare to leave me," she gulped. "Not one of you must leave this town till you can take me with you."

Bryant sat down at the table and began to butter a roll, and his companions hastened to follow the example.

"We'll stay," he said comfortably. "But we need not point out to a lady of your discrimination that it must be as your guests. However, don't put us up in the town's gilded hostelry. Our tastes are modest. There's a little hotel in the suburbs called the Blake, of which I have reason to think well. It has only two rules. Guests are expected to bury their own dead, and no one is permitted to take cocaine in the elevator. Something tells me we shall be very comfortable there."

Alone in his own room, David listened to the cheerful acclaim which followed this prediction.

## CHAPTER XII

THE daily express-train from Adneyport to Grandon clanked to its destination. In addition to half a dozen coaches, it had a "drawing-room" car, with a private section at each end, a baggage-car, and a right of way that was abruptly disputed at intervals.

The baggage-car contained, among other valuables, a fiercely resentful white setter puppy traveling in a crate. It also held what was left of Mrs. David Goddard's smart roadster. The drawing-room car sheltered in its private compartments what Chad Bailey lightly described as "all that was left of Dorry's matrimonial venture." In one section Mrs. Goddard and Miss Perkins rode, the former stretched out at full length on a couch, the latter facing her in a corner chair, and the mood of both as black as that of Freckles. In the other section Mr. Goddard languished, passing the hours in self-communion and in robust refusals of well-meaning offers of service made by Mr. Bailey and Mr. Bryant, who frequently lounged in from the smoking-car. From all of which it will be clear that young Mrs. Goddard had carried out her

announced purpose of keeping the Black Butterflies in Adneyport until she herself was able to accompany them home.

The day was Monday, and not even the determinedly optimistic Mr. Bailey held that the interval between this day and the preceding Friday had been pleasant, though he dwelt earnestly on the excellence of the meals and the comfort of the beds at the Adneyport hotel. David and Dorinda had quietly vetoed the Blake, and the Butterflies had settled down without complaint in the "gilded hostelry" they professed to scorn. Their mornings, spent in those warmly recommended beds, had been endurable. They had their breakfasts in their respective rooms, an article of their creed being that no human being was justified in seeking the society of other human beings, on any day or on any condition, till the hour of noon had struck. After that there was the amelioration of a good luncheon, followed by a leisurely lingering over cigars and cigarettes in Kitty's sitting-room. But from there on, even their elemental sense of responsibility directed them to the hospital as ministers of grace and comfort to their stricken hostess; and by half after nine at night, when they were waved out of her room by an overwrought nurse, all three had invariably reached the extreme limit of a self-control not remarkable at its best. The inevitable result was a series of night diversions at the hotel which appalled the management and horrified the town.

There had been, for example, the "old-fashioned sleighing party," to which, lacking other acquaintances, they had hospitably invited the hotel servants. There was also the extemporaneous Saturday-night dance in Kitty's sitting-room, overflowing into the upper hall and attended by congenial souls the Butterflies had gathered in from highways and byways. And there was the final exploit of a Sunday-night theater party of so boisterous a character that the curtain had to be lowered during the play and the members of the party escorted down the middle aisle to the outer air.

The details of this occasion were given to David by Chad on the train Monday morning.

"I'm no Adam," Chad began, "but this time the fault really was the lady's. You know how executive Kitty is; so she usually attends to the details of our parties. As it happened, we did n't get to the theater till the middle of the first act. There was a whole row of seats reserved for us very near the front, for of course we had invited a few friends; and I'm not saying that there was n't some confusion in getting down the middle aisle, for we were all a bit rosy. I suppose the audience noticed us, and perhaps the company did. Kitty was very particular about getting us into the right seats, and she gave a lot of directions in a clear voice and changed us around two or three times. But we got seated before the act ended, and Kitty and most of the rest of us went to sleep, so everything was serene till the middle of the second act. Then, un-

fortunately, Kitty woke up, and she decided that we were n't paired off right, so she got us all into the middle aisle and seated us over again. We did n't mind, and I don't think the audience did. In fact, one chap up in the balcony gave us a rousing cheer. But the star and the company got peevish. So when Kitty woke during the third act, and decided to move us up to the balcony next to the chap that had cheered, and we gathered in the aisle to discuss it, we seemed to arouse some hard feelings. Anyway, we were all put out. I did my best to explain that it was a mistake and that the company ought to be put out instead, and most of the audience agreed with me. They said so even at the time, and a dozen men told me afterward that we were a' whole lot more entertaining than the show. But some managers are awfully myopic," Chad ended with a sigh.

"You know what college students are, Mr. Heming," David had urged when the hotel's manager excitedly telephoned him about these outbursts. "Our friends are merely giving vent to their high spirits. Sit tight and they will be gone by Monday. Of course we'll pay for all that breakage you speak of."

To Doctor Parker and the nurse, both scandalized by the reports that were reaching them, he administered the same soothing reminder.

"They're young and a bit gay, and they're just bound to break loose after they leave the hospital at

night," he pointed out. "But you must admit they act pretty well while they're here."

The point was well taken, and it helped David in his patient efforts to avoid the final catastrophe of the Butterflies' expulsion from the hotel. It was true that the first appearance of Mrs. Goddard's three friends had not been reassuring to the hospital authorities. But when they had gone to the hotel for baths and dinner, and had later returned in immaculate evening clothes and with the engaging youthful charm they could all assume at will, there was a reaction in their favor. The next morning, Saturday, with Parker's permission, Dorinda telephoned to a local music-house and rented a small upright piano, which was delivered before noon; and from two o'clock on Miss Perkins held the hospital staff, and such patients as could hear her, in the hollows of her beautiful hands. Even Goddard presented himself on Dorinda's threshold when the recital began, wearing a determined smile. Patients in private rooms up and down the length of the main corridor left their doors open, that no note might escape them; and Doctor Parker, who really loved and appreciated good music, sat spell-bound for an hour while sufferers both in and out of the hospital vainly waited for him.

"Why, the girl plays better than any professional pianiste I've ever heard!" he told David, while Kitty was throwing her gorgeous splashes of color over Bala-



kiref's "Islamey." "By Jove! she plays all the way up and down one's spine! I don't know when I've been so impressed by music. Who is she, anyway?"

"Just an amateur; but a genius, of course. She could be at the top if she wanted to, but she won't play in public."

"Why not? Stage-fright?"

"Nothing like it. I fancy Kitty Perkins is n't afraid of anything. It's merely a notion of hers, but she lives up to it. Isn't willing to play for money. Thinks playing for any one but her friends would be a prostitution of her art!"

Suddenly, and greatly to his surprise, David realized that he was speaking of Kitty with the complacent pride of an admiring intimate. Put into his own words, what Dorinda had told him of Kitty's attitude toward her music struck him as rather fine—a mistaken notion, of course, and one that might not bear analysis, but a big conception if looked at from a certain angle.

Parker, however, revealed an unexpected flash of insight.

"I don't believe she feels equal to the gaff," he muttered, fixing on Kitty a suddenly professional eye. "The life of a concert pianiste is a hard one, and I doubt if she's up to it. In fact, all your friends look pretty soft, to me," he added frankly as he rose at last to hasten to his waiting patients.

David admitted that Kitty's playing and her soft,

throaty contralto singing won tolerance for the Butterflies both at the hospital and in the hotel.

"If you could get that girl away from those two fellows, you could make something worth while of her," he told Dorinda Saturday evening, under the influence of a Brahms Intermezzo.

She smiled mockingly.

"You've just got to shape other people's lives for them, have n't you, David?" she murmured. The brief exchange of thought was the first they had indulged in since the candid discussion of Friday. He flushed under her tone, but answered quietly:

"If I saw some one tied to a railroad track I'd have an impulse to get him away from it before a train came along."

"I don't think Chad and Jim have ever been called a railroad track before," Dorinda mused. "Of course they've been called almost everything else. I must tell them about this."

She was impossible and he let it go at that, lending himself to Kitty and Brahms with an apparent concentration that soon became real.

His sense of justice, which was strong, made him increasingly recognize the Butterflies' successful effort at good behavior during the hours on duty in the hospital. Kitty played to her friend many hours a day, both Saturday and Sunday, as Dorinda never tired of hearing her. Having planned bridge, the Butterflies kindly made the game Five Hundred, that David might

join the circle. Jim, who read aloud with the art of an Otis Skinner, read to Dorinda till his throat ached. Chad's irrepressible good spirits subtly infected them all. Indeed, as comforters of the sick there was no question that the Black Butterflies were making good, though they smoked till the room was blue, carpeted the floor with newspapers, magazines, and cigarette stubs, and wallowed in turn on Dorinda's bed till the nurse protested that she could not continue to make it up a dozen times a day.

But the nights! After Friday night, David could not sleep, wondering in what particular fashion Dorinda's guests were breaking forth. His second private conversation with her, which took place on Sunday, did not calm his spirits.

"Did n't I hear you answering some complaints from the hotel this morning?" she abruptly demanded when he entered her room to make polite inquiry as to her progress. Formal courtesy was their note when they were alone together, as now, though when others were around, both still endeavored to convey the impression of a warmer relationship than this would imply.

"Yes."

"What had they been doing?"

"Having a Saturday night spree at the hotel, with the riffraff of the town as their guests."

She frowned—but less over the Butterflies' misbehavior, he knew, than over his way of describing it.

"I wish the hotel management would make their

complaints to me, and not to you," she snapped.

"Why should they?"

"Because I 'm responsible."

"They can't be expected to know that," he pointed out.

"No, but I ought to have foreseen it myself, before we went into this idiotic experiment."

He had been standing before her, as she sat in a wheel-chair by the window. Now he swung a small chair into position and sat down facing her.

"Dorinda," he said seriously, "I hate to be a quitter, but I 've reached the point where I feel just as you do about this business. It was a crazy experiment, and the sooner we end it, the better. I simply want to say that when we get back to Grandon I will help you to get out of it. It will be a nasty mess, and there's bound to be a lot of publicity. But let's keep a stiff upper lip and go through with it. If we do it at once, people will think it was just another impulsive escapade—"

"Of mine," she interrupted.

"Of ours," he corrected. "They certainly won't admire my position any more than they will yours. But they will soon forget the whole thing."

"Oh, it will be easy enough for you!" she said. "You 'll go your pious way, and the town will say you were lucky to get out of the clutches of a vampire—"

"It will be the hardest thing I 've ever done in my life," he quietly interrupted. "If you think it won't,

change your mind. I'd rather lose an arm than go through with it; but you want it ended, don't you?"

"No, I don't!"

He stared at her.

"You don't?" he stammered.

"No, I don't. It's a devilish mess to be in, but we'll merely be in a more devilish mess if we try to get out of it."

For a moment he studied her in silence.

"So that's it," he said slowly. "Your idea is to keep right along as you're doing, complaining about what we've done, wishing we were out of it, yet not having nerve enough to get out of it, and giving me the benefit of your black moods. Well, my girl, that is n't my idea, and I'll tell you right now," he ended incisively, "that is not the way it's going to be."

"Is n't it?" She spoke without looking at him, and in a tone that conveyed nothing.

He rose, took a turn around the small room, and came back to deliver his ultimatum on his feet, before her.

"No, it is n't," he said steadily. "I've been a shuttle-cock so far, but now I'm either going to get out or I'm going to have a new deal. If I get out, I'll make it as easy for you as I can. I'll take all the blame. I'll let you get a divorce on any grounds you choose. I suppose a man owes that to any woman, and especially to a young girl. Anyway, that's the theory, and I'm ready to stand for it. Personally, I'll charge

up this whole infernal business to the profit and loss of life, and let it go at that. Moreover, I 'll clench my jaws and no one will ever hear a peep out of me about it. In short, so far as I can bring it about, you 'll get off scot-free."

"What 's the alternative?" Again her voice was non-committal.

"The alternative is exactly what I 've said,—a new deal,—and this time I 'll make the conditions, not you. You can think things over till we get back to Grandon, and after we have settled down there we 'll have another talk. Then you can make up your mind which course you 'll follow. But one thing is certain. We 'll have no more whining and no more wabbling. And no more temperamental spasms."

He thrust his free hand into the pocket of his bathrobe, and looked down at her with steady eyes. The line of his jaw was sharply defined.

"Think it over," he repeated. "We 'll get out of this absolutely, or we 'll go on along new lines. It 's for you to decide which it 's going to be."

"I hate you!" she flung at him.

He nodded.

"That ought to make it easier for you to decide," he reminded her, and strolled out of the room.

It was of his ultimatum they were both thinking as the train clanked on.

"I suppose I was a fool to even give her another chance," David told himself. "I ought to have in-

sisted on getting out of the hellish mess as soon as we got back. If we did that, the town would think we had married during a spree and realized our blunder when we came to our senses, and sooner or later we 'd be able to live it down. The longer we keep together, the harder it 's going to be to separate."

"He 'll dictate, will he?" Dorinda said between her teeth. "He 'll decide, will he? Well, we 'll see if he does!"

In the baggage-car Freckles howled dolefully, regardless of the comfort administered through his bars by Chad, who kindly included the puppy in his attentions to the sufferers on the train.

"I think I could howl better than Freckles if I tried," Chad told David, he and Bryant having dropped into Goddard's compartment for one of their frequent visits. "I feel like doing better," he earnestly added. "Shall I try?"

"No," said David, briefly, and Bryant snapped, with an irritability very unusual in him. "For God's sake, Chad, get out. Can't you see you 're on our nerves?"

David grinned. Bryant's inability to see that he himself was badly on David's nerves had been disturbing the bridegroom all morning. For some reason, Jim had been as persistently attentive as an annoying fly.

"Well, I like that," Chad said, and retired huffily. Bryant at last revealed the secret of his own attentions.

"Goddard," he began as soon as the compartment



door closed after his friend, "I've made quite a record with you, but now I'm going to break it because I'm in a hole."

David raised his black eyebrows. He was not much interested. His own personal outlook on life was too bleak, and his personal hole was too deep, to permit much sympathy for others.

"I've seen a lot of you for six weeks," Bryant went on, "and I have n't tried to borrow money. I've never borrowed money from a woman, and I've never failed to borrow from a man I thought would lend it. So far I've let you off, because I knew you were under unusual expenses. But I'm going to borrow from you now."

"No, you're not, old man," David said wearily.

"You mean you won't let me have it?"

"I don't know whether I'd let you have it or not, but that question need n't come up. I'm sorry, but the cold fact is that I have n't any money myself."

"But . . . I've got to have money," Bryant said with panic in his voice. "I thought of course you'd let me have it. I tell you I'm in a hole."

"So am I," David mentioned. "I'm up to my neck in debt, and it will take me months to pay it off."

Bryant stared at him, at first resentfully, then with depressed acceptance. But he made a final effort.

"You have a rich wife," he muttered.

"I know. But she has n't a rich husband," David said savagely.

Bryant rose, and for a moment stood swaying with the motion of the train as he stared out of the compartment's wide window. David looked at him curiously. There was something very eloquent in Bryant's silence. To the observer came the definite knowledge that the man was in trouble and that the trouble was serious.

"I'm sorry," David said again, this time with real feeling. "But I have n't more than a few dollars left and I owe Hatch hundreds."

Bryant nodded, his face expressionless.

"All right. I suppose it will come out some way," he muttered. "The Lord knows how." Suddenly he dropped his eyes to Goddard's. "Then I've got to earn some money," he added urgently. "Why don't you take me on as valet for a week or two? You'll need some one to help you, with that arm out of commission."

David shook his head.

"I don't know just how I'll get along," he admitted. "I'm as awkward as the devil about dressing and undressing, and I think I've been moving the arm too much, for it hurts like the dickens to-day. But I'll have to manage some way. I suppose I can use Johnny. I can't afford any other help." An unpleasant sense of his companion's deepening depression made him add the last confidence he would naturally have made to Bryant. "You see, I'm trying to meet all my own personal expenses," he blurted. "Naturally, I don't want to take money from my wife."

Bryant nodded again without other comment, straightened his thin shoulders, and turned to the door.

"That 's settled," he said in his usual detached tone. "Suppose we go and see how Dorry and Kit are getting along."

David got up and the two made their way to the other compartment, where, it now appeared, Chad had preceded them. At their entrance he rose with exaggerated respect.

"Behold, the bridegroom cometh," he murmured. "I hope I need n't point out to a perfect gentleman like Jim and a perfect lady like Kitty that our present cue is to leave the happy couple alone. Let us go to the baggage-car and start that competition with Freckles."

"Chad, don't be an idiot," Dorinda snapped. "Stay where you are."

But Chad had already lifted Kitty from her seat with a light hand under an elbow, and was holding the door open for her. Notwithstanding a second protest from Dorinda, she left the compartment and Bryant followed. Chad lingered outside of the threshold, his bright head thrust around the door he held ajar.

"I 'll take them back to the baggage-car," he said confidentially, "and we 'll see if we can howl louder than Freckles. I 'm almost sure we can. Anyway, I 'm going to find out. Freckles is getting a little tired. And, children,—” his faun-like face grinned at them impishly,—“something tells me that for several days there has been a drop of gall in the honey, a little rift

within the lute. Kiss and make up. That you may have ample opportunity to do so, I am locking the door on the outside. I will return anon, which in this instance means an hour or two."

David sprang toward him, at risk to the injured ribs; but they heard the turn of the key with Chad's final words, and its withdrawal from the lock.

"The little wretch! I'll make him pay for this!" Dorinda cried, her darkened face twisting with anger.

David sat down beside the couch and picked up a newspaper.

"How about a truce till our final decision?" he suggested. "Let's get even with Chad by not letting him annoy us. Have you read this newspaper yet?"

"No." He could see that she was striving for self-control.

"Then I'll run through the head-lines for you, and we'll see what's happening to other folks. I'm no platform reader, but I can manage to give you the news."

Chad, returning three quarters of an hour later in a somewhat contrite frame of mind, found a pleasant domestic scene awaiting him. The bride had fallen asleep, and the bridegroom, slightly hoarse, but still very much in the ring, was reading in low and soothing tones the latest quotations of the Chicago stock exchange.

"I've read them half a dozen times," he admitted, when, released, he slipped out of the state-room and

joined Chad in the vestibule. "Did n't dare to stop for fear she 'd wake up. Parker said it would do her a lot of good if she could snatch a nap on the journey."

Chad nodded, inwardly relieved. As usual, his improved spirits found expression in a fountain of words.

"We had a great contest out in the baggage-car, with the train crew as judges," he told David, as the two walked back to the latter's state-room. "The general idea was to out-howl Dorry's pup, and of course we all did that, so there was n't much excitement. But we discovered that Jim could look more like the pup than the pup looked like himself. By Jove, if we had put Jim in the crate, we could hardly have told them apart! We tried to, of course, and some of the crew helped us; but there was n't room and Jim did n't lend himself properly to the experiment. Still, the effort was worth while.

"After that," he went on with unction, "Kitty nipped my ankle better than any dog has ever done it, though a lot of dogs have practised on me. It was all quite a treat for the trainmen," he ended with relish. "They have n't much pleasure in their lives, poor devils."

"It must have been," David grimly agreed. So they could n't even take a journey without making an exhibition of themselves on the train. However, he was glad to infer that Bryant's spirits had revived. Chad read his expression and smiled sunnily.

"The long, long day is o'er," he quoted. "We'll be in Grandon in twenty minutes, admiringly watched by half the populace as we get off the train. There's to be an ambulance for Dorry at the station, is n't there? And a stretcher for us to get her out?"

"We won't need any stretcher," David said shortly. "I shall carry her, of course."

Chad nodded again.

"You think of everything," he admitted. "That will look better. But how about your arm?"

"Damn!" said David.

He had quite forgotten his arm. That took some doing, too. It had been aching all day.

"There will be a doctor and a nurse at the station with the ambulance," he stiffly told Chad. "They'll see to everything."

## CHAPTER XIII

**T**HE loungers in the Grandon station felt repaid for their long wait when they saw the town's model young man at the head of his bride's stretcher, supporting with his uninjured hand his share of the light burden, while the doctor and nurse and Bryant bore the rest. Indeed, the spectacle was so moving that friends who had withheld judgment on his marriage, and others who had strongly expressed judgment, crowded one another in their efforts to greet him. He smiled at them understandingly, and Dorinda, whose congested face was covered by a veil—"I won't have those vultures staring at any more of me than I can help," she had ruled—listened with a twisted smile to his cheerful replies to sympathetic inquiries. He got into the ambulance with the patient and the new nurse and sat in the doctor's seat at Dorinda's feet, while that surprised and slightly resentful gentleman hung precariously on the ambulance step. At the house the little band of Dorinda's servants were waiting in the hall, and the task of getting the stretcher upstairs and putting the new Mrs. Goddard to bed was accomplished under the interested eyes of Annie the maid, Kate the English cook, who efficiently helped in the transfer, and even Johnny, the outdoor boy.



"It's all so unnecessary," the patient protested. "I was perfectly able to be dressed for the journey, and to get off the train with a little help; and I did n't need an ambulance any more than I need wings. I really don't need a nurse, either," she gloomily continued. "I'm perfectly all right, and I shall be as good as new in a day or two."

"Of course you will," Doctor Warren soothingly assured her. "But in the meantime the long journey was very trying, and Doctor Parker was right to take every precaution. Be good, and stay in your room for a day or two of complete rest, and then you can do anything you like."

The members of the Butterflies parted from their hostess immediately, at the urgent suggestion of the new nurse, whose name was revealed as Allen.

"Mrs. Goddard has had a hard day," she severely reminded them, "and she needs complete rest."

"Something told me," Chad regretfully put it as he followed the procession downstairs, "that we would n't be expected to stay for dinner. But I suppose we can refresh ourselves at the sideboard on our way out, can't we, Goddard?"

David escorted the guests to the dining-room, gloomily telling himself that he felt like a cat in a strange garret. The picture of the third floor back in Mrs. Kemp's boarding-house swung enticingly before him. From Chad's gossip at the hospital he had gathered that Mrs. Kemp missed him. Forgetting the

matter of the four muffins, she daily referred to him with a mother's interest. His nostalgia was a physical sensation, affecting the pit of his stomach.

To Annie, who showed a determination to keep a steadfast eye on the decanters while the Butterflies were near the sideboard, he gave his first order as master of the house.

"Ask Kate to send up a big plate of sandwiches, please," he suggested. "She can make them of anything she has."

He was rewarded by the immediate enthusiasm of his hearers.

"I always said Goddard must have some redeeming quality," Chad proudly pointed out, "and here it is. It proves my theory that if we observe any one long enough . . ." When the sandwiches came, Goddard left them to the Triumvirate, whose funds, he knew, might not run to dinner. However, they would not mind this now. They would adjourn to Kitty's "studio" and smoke and talk half the night. In the meantime, he was glad they were here. They showed a lingering disposition to give him the continued solace of their presence; but at six o'clock Kitty succeeded in luring Jim and Chad out of the house, after they had filled their pockets with cigarettes. David went upstairs to dress for dinner—a function Annie mentioned as taking place at seven. He got through the ordeal with some help from Johnny and before he went downstairs again he tapped at his wife's door.

"She's asleep," the nurse told him, and smiled reassuringly. "But you can come in and look at her if you like. That might make you feel more comfortable."

She was a young person of intelligence, and she meditated for some moments afterward on the odd look in the young husband's vivid blue eyes; but he spoke casually enough.

"Thanks, I won't risk it," he said. "I might wake her."

As he descended the big staircase on his way to the dining-room, David wished he had asked Doctor Warren to stay to dinner. He might easily have done so; indeed, the courtesy may have been expected of him, for the two were old acquaintances and the doctor had spoken of seeing his patient again about nine o'clock. After that Doctor Warren had slipped out of the house, without even looking in on the group in the dining-room. Didn't approve of them, of course, David reflected; and who could blame him?

Annie drew out Goddard's chair—an attention to which he was not accustomed—and the new master sat down in a state of depression which slowly lifted under a growing sense of comfort and well-being.

The dining-room, furnished, like the rest of the house, with the excellent taste characteristic of Dorinda's grandfather, was a peaceful refuge for a man weary in body and soul. An open fire sent roaring flames up a wide chimney-shaft. Shaded lights re-

flected the luster of silver and crystal and the high polish of old mahogany. Evidently Kate had not forgotten their Christmas fox-trot, for the first dinner she prepared for the new master, while it was not elaborate, was a perfect thing of its kind. The attentions of Annie, who cut up the filet mignon and mushrooms and kept his claret-glass filled, were constant but never annoying. At the end of the meal she brought him a box of the excellent cigars always on the sideboard for the Butterflies, and which they usually ignored in favor of a cheap brand of cigarettes they had mentioned to Dorinda as their first choice. Annie expertly held a match for David's cigar, filled a liqueur-glass with apricot brandy, placed the decanter and the cigars within easy reach of his serviceable hand, saw to it that his small coffee-cup was full, and made her first remark:

"Anything else, sir?"

David smiled at her.

"Nothing, Annie, except to thank you for perfect service of a perfect meal. And give my compliments to Kate, please, and tell her she's a wonder."

"Thank you, sir."

Annie retired, enveloped in a modest blush and with a definite determination to stand by this engaging young man, throughout conditions she foresaw would be difficult. When the door had closed behind her the new master settled back on the end of his spine, with a deep-drawn sigh of content. A little later, he knew,

his depression would fly at his throat like an angry dog, but for the hour he was enveloped in a sense of well-being. He had deliberately lent himself to every luxury offered him—not only to the food, the warmth, the sense of relaxation, but to the wine, the liqueur, the cigar. He reflected that he would n't do this often. He had no idea of making himself soft by frequent indulgence in such sybaritic delights. He'd cut out most of the alcohol, but during his short stay here he would have his pipes and tobacco-jar up in his own quarters, and lend himself to their solace at times, as he had always done, as well as to the other comforts around him. It would do him no harm to sink for a few weeks into these soft cushions of life.

To-night the best of his luxuries was the luxury of being alone. He was glad now he had not asked the doctor to stay to dinner. He would finish the cigar here, in the unbroken though temporary peace of his own society, and then go up to his rooms and make a careful inspection of them. So far, he had not had time to do this. He had not even turned on the lights in his sitting-room, when he hurriedly passed through it on his way to his bedroom; and while dressing in the latter his combined pain, fatigue, and depression had permitted only a subconscious realization of its spacious comfort, and of the general up-to-dateness of the connecting bath-room. It would be interesting to look over those new quarters, even though he would occupy

them but a week or two. After that, the deluge! The talk, the knowing grins, the avid curiosity!

Depression awoke in him like a live thing, stirring and stretching, but he banished it with a resolute effort of will. No demons of that kind now. They were upstairs at this moment, no doubt, waiting for him to get into bed, waiting for darkness to fall and for the late night hours to come so they could drag their chains around his room. But he would hold to the relaxation of this hour, which God knows he needed.

He swung his chair away from the table and close to the fire and sank deeply into it, his legs stretched out before him, his head against its tapestried back, his blue eyes on the now dying logs. Useless to replenish the fire; he would be there only ten or fifteen minutes longer. Besides, he didn't want to stir. Once the door opened softly and Annie glanced in on him, but he did not hear her and she considerably retreated, leaving him to his thoughts. The poor young man!—worried to death about his wife, as like as not. And not all his worries was the accident, neither! In which sage reflection Annie was right, as usual.

David finished his cigar and took his time to it. Then with an unconscious sigh he rose and went upstairs, making a detour to the upper rear hall to be sure that Freckles was comfortable for the night. The puppy, which had just enjoyed a brisk run in the open air with Johnny and was now freshly bedded in



his box and filled with a meal as excellent in its way as David's, received him without enthusiasm. Strange things had happened to Freckles to-day, and this god of his had permitted them. Moreover, he had not even come in to that cold prison to look at Freckles through his bars. His mistress had not come near him, either. Freckles was reaching the conclusion that Johnny, about whom he had heretofore cherished some doubts, was the only real friend he had. He received with phlegm the stroking David bent to give him, and the snubbed god grinned understandingly.

"A little peevish to-night, are n't you, old boy?" he asked. "So am I. Well, you'll feel a lot better to-morrow morning and I'll feel a lot worse. That's the difference between us."

He gave the puppy's head a final pat, looked at his water-bowl to be sure it was full, and strolled away. Freckles whimpered dolefully. He had been all ready to come to an understanding as soon as dignity permitted it, and this irritating two-legged creature had wandered off again.

David went on to his own rooms, fighting off a dark cloud that hovered menacingly just above him. Too soon for that yet. Could n't a fellow have at least another hour's respite? A fellow could. As he opened the door of his sitting-room he stopped on the threshold with a sudden heart-lift. The excellent Annie had been there before him, for now the lights were lit and a match had been touched to kindling and



waiting logs in the fireplace. The warmth and illumination flashed out a greeting as definite as the smile of a friend. He slowly crossed the threshold, closed the door, and standing with his back to it looked around him. His rooms were on the side of the house, in a wing cutting out from the left, and this sitting-room had a window overlooking the distant street and two side windows facing a lawn. The shades had not been drawn, and through the openings he had vague glimpses of a winter night with a bit of star-sprinkled sky, clear and frosty, and distant stretches of snow. At the right of the front window a door opened into rooms at the front of the house—Dorinda's, no doubt. At right angles to this was the door he had entered from the hall.

Drawn up to the fire a big easy-chair stood, with a reading-lamp beside it, the table holding several books and half a dozen new magazines. At the other arm of the chair a smoking-table held cigars, ash-trays, and a lighter. The rug was a soft, rich-toned Oriental, and the silk window-curtains blended with its autumnal tones. There was a big stuffed and cushioned davenport at the left of the fireplace,—an ideal place to lie and read,—and several additional easy-chairs were scattered about the room. A fine old clock stood in a corner. There were only three pictures on the walls, all good, and the mahogany mantel over the fire held nothing but a small Chinese porcelain jar full of matches. By a window near the door leading to his

bedroom stood a beautiful old Sheraton secretary, its desk down, its numerous pigeonholes hospitably empty, and a telephone conveniently near it. David remembered Dorinda's words: "I'm quietly having Father's rooms put in order for you . . . You can make any changes you like" . . . She had gone to a lot of trouble. It was an ideal sitting-room for a man—large, simple, beautiful. It looked now as if no one lived in it, but he could have changed all that with his books and pipes and racks and tobacco-jars and his few university trophies.

He dropped into the waiting easy-chair and stared into the heart of the fire. For the first time there swept over him a full realization of what the girl in the next room had offered him in the strange bargain they had made. Heretofore, it now seemed to him, his thoughts had been wholly concerned with what he was giving her. His name, a share of his clean record, the more independent and established position of a married woman as against that of an unprotected girl with no safe background. From her point of view, he now saw, he was receiving in exchange for these things comfort, luxury, the assurance of freedom from the sordid cares of poverty, more leisure, opportunity for study in an ideal environment. Not as one-sided a bargain as he had thought. It might have worked out very successfully with a girl of a different type,—or yes, with a man of a different type. It could never work out successfully with a man of his type. No

beauty, no luxury, no leisure, could make up for the torture of mind and the recurrent humiliations he had experienced during the past week.

He rose and passed through the rear connecting door into his bedroom, taking in now in detail the big mahogany four-poster, the generous chest of drawers, the high-boy and low-boy, and the well-equipped dressing-case, the roomy closets with their wide shelves, the connecting bath-room, evidently made over from a smaller bedroom, with its shining nickel faucets, its glass rods, its impressive array of towels. Comfort and luxury here, certainly. She had counted on all these things to make up for the impossible position in which, he now believed, she had fully realized that she was placing him.

He walked over to the bed and looked down at it, his right hand in the pocket of his dinner jacket. Annie had prepared the bed for the night, taking off the spread and folding back the upper sheet. Across the foot of the bed lay something that had not been there when he dressed for dinner. He bent to look at it. It was a silk dressing-gown, dark and rich, with its heavy cord in place and its whole air warmly inviting. Its wide-flung sleeves actually seemed to reach out to him as he stared down at it. He whistled softly.

"She did n't overlook a trick in the way of preparation," he told himself. He picked up the dressing-gown and hung it away in an otherwise empty closet. Then he unpacked his new traveling case. No doubt

he would be here for a few days, anyway. He would have to give the girl time to get over the final effects of nervous shock before springing on her another demand for a show-down. The case was all he had taken with him on the honeymoon journey. His trunk, packed and strapped, stood in the storeroom of Mrs. Kemp's establishment, awaiting his order to express it to the Maxwell house. He grinned a sardonic grin, telling himself he hoped the third floor back was waiting, too.

The big clock in his sitting-room struck eleven times. He had not known it was so late. He must have come upstairs about ten and put in an hour since then. He took off his coat, collar, and tie, and heard a tap on the opposite door in his sitting-room. He opened it guardedly, and Miss Allen faced him on the threshold.

"Mrs. Goddard is awake now," she said in a low tone, "and she's very restless. She asked if there was a light in your room, so I know she wants to see you. If you come in it may quiet her, but you must n't stay more than five minutes; and please be very careful what you say. I don't believe those people at Adneyport realize at all the extent of the shock she has had," she ended, almost impatiently.

David hesitated. The blundering of well-meaning doctors and nurses was making things very difficult for him and the girl—a contingency which of course no one could have foreseen.

"I'll come," he said, "if you feel that I ought to. But first you'd better make sure that my wife really

wants to see me. Suppose you ask her while I slip into my bath-robe."

He turned away before she could answer, and, hurrying into his bedroom, put on the familiar red bath-robe. When he returned to the sitting-room he found Miss Allen waiting with less assurance than she had radiated five minutes before.

"I told her you were all ready to come," she said, rather doubtfully, "so I really think you 'd better . . ."

David followed her across the threshold, into the big bedroom, entering by that eloquent connecting door. Only a night light was burning, and he groped his way toward a bed in a corner through a dimness which gave him no impression save a general sense of spaciousness. When he came to a pause beside the bed, the nurse was hovering in the background and he hoped she was not too observant. In any event, he had no mind for what he mentally characterized as "any more grandstand play." Then, suddenly, at sight of the small congested face on the pillow, his resentment gave place to the finer emotion of pity. The poor girl looked very young, very helpless, and very pathetic lying there. He knelt by the bedside, that he might speak in a tone unheard by the nurse.

"I hope you 're feeling a lot better," he said gently. "It has been a hard day for you."

"I don't feel better. I feel worse," she announced, in the same tone.

"I 'm sorry. Things will be better in the morning."

"No, they won't. I'm worrying about what you said."

"Don't you think it's foolish to start that now?"

"No, I don't. I can't quiet down while I'm worrying about it. Do you remember," she asked suddenly, "suggesting in my state-room that we should sign a truce for a little while?"

"Yes." He wondered what this was leading to.

"That's what I want to do now. I want you to promise me a truce for a month."

He hesitated, and his heart dropped. Another month of this sort of thing!

"If you don't, I'll go all to smash," she declared, positively. "How can I relax and sleep and get better, as they're ordering me to do, if I feel that you're going to start that discussion in a few days, before I'm up to it?"

There was something in this.

"All right," he agreed. "I'll wait a month, unless you have another temperamental spasm in the meantime."

"Thank you." She spoke on a breath of relief, ignoring all but the promise. "Are you comfortable in your rooms?"

"Very, thanks." A belated acknowledgment came from him. "You must have taken a lot of trouble to get them ready."

"I did," she said simply, and added with the amazing



inconsequence of women, "Why are n't you wearing your new dressing-gown?"

He laughed softly.

"Girls are strange creatures!" he said. "I'm learning something new every day. Do you really think I could have put that on?"

"Did n't you like it?" she persisted.

"Why, I don't think I gave that aspect of it any thought."

"What did you do with it?"

"I hung it away in a closet. I must say good night now," he added. "Miss Allen is getting restless."

"She is n't half as restless as I am. Please wear the dressing-gown while you're here. Will you?"

"All right, if you think I'll go better with the furniture. Good night." It came to him that he was being ungracious, and he added, "I had a wonderful dinner."

"That's good," she said almost drowsily. "I told Annie and Kate to take care of you. I feel better since you've promised," she unexpectedly ended. "Good night."

"Good night."

He rose to his feet and went back to his rooms with a nod to Miss Allen. He felt no sense of the uplift Dorinda's previous capitulations had brought to him. They meant, he had decided, a passing mood and nothing more. No doubt she would be as unreasonably



tyrannical as ever in a day or two, but of course he had done the right thing in granting her request. The girl would hardly be herself again in less than a month, and he could not turn his back on her while she was not herself. In the meantime, there was always a chance that she would flare up, and leave him no course but to get out immediately. The next flare-up on her part would be the last. On that point his decision was fixed and final.

He expected to lie awake for hours, with those restless demons in his room. As he turned off the reading-light at the head of his bed and felt the darkness envelop him he was prepared for their immediate activities. But the bed was the best he had ever lain in, and through the window at the left he had a heartening glimpse of the stars. As an odd companion-piece to these he saw the face of Dorinda—that poor little discolored, disfigured face, only two rooms away—looking up from its pillow, and heard again the sigh of content with which she had received his promise.

From that his mind turned to thoughts of Hatch. He would go back to his work in the morning, of course, and the most trying episode of what would be at best a trying day must be his talk with Hatch and his effort to adjust the matter of that advance, wired to the hospital, which Hatch had naturally sent in Goddard's name. It had been a large advance,—five hundred dollars,—but there had not been much of it left after David paid all the hospital bills, together with the

Butterflies' bills at the hotel, besides settlement for damages which included a broken runner on the big sleigh used by the sleighing party. With a tact worthy of the cause, he had extracted from the hospital authorities an individual bill for his personal indebtedness. His plan was to ask Hatch to consider this amount, just under a hundred dollars, as an additional loan to himself, and to have the law firm charge the balance of the advance to Dorinda. But this meant talk, explanations; and at the mere prospect of the talk and the explanations Goddard's face burned in the darkness.

He could not have banished the demons by pleasant thoughts, even if the pleasant thoughts responded to his invitation. But evidently the contemplation of the Hatch interview was sufficiently disheartening to placate them, for they did not make their presence obtrusive. He discovered with incredulous satisfaction that he was getting sleepy. Before he had time to congratulate himself on this he was deep in a dream which held Hatch in its center as the triumphant bridegroom of Dorinda, leading her down the center aisle of a great cathedral after the ceremony, while the Black Butterflies danced in advance of the pair, dropping newspapers and cigarette stubs at their feet in place of flowers.

## CHAPTER XIV

THE interview with Hatch, which took place soon after ten o'clock the next morning, was not so taxing an episode as David had pictured it. Indeed, the once critical law clerk of Hatch, Fuller, and Kimball was readjusting his ideas of his chief, with a thoroughness somewhat embarrassing to a young man proud of his insight. Granting that the senior partner's consideration was shown not to his clerk but to Dorinda Maxwell's husband, it was becoming clear that Goddard had been all wrong about Hatch. Hatch need not have shown any consideration to his ward's husband; he was in a position of extreme independence toward them both. Obviously Hatch was human as well as indolent, understanding as well as epicurean, a tactful lawyer as well as an able one. With an affable wave of the over-plump pink hand Hatch cut short the young man's embarrassed explanations.

"I understand perfectly, my dear boy," he assured the dear boy who had so suddenly risen to that eminence. "I don't think you're right in your notion that you must pay all your own personal expenses—even those due to a disaster for which, knowing something of my young friend's driving, I should say she

was at least partly responsible. Oh, well, perhaps not," he hurriedly amended as David tried to interrupt. "Quite a tragedy, I recall. But it certainly was through no fault of yours. However, I'm not arguing with you; I'm merely accepting your view. I'll charge up an additional ninety-two dollars against our loan to you personally, and we will let this second loan stand till you have paid off the first one."

"You're mighty good to me, Mr. Hatch," David said with feeling. "I shall never forget it."

"Oh, that's all right. Always liked you, you know, and had faith in you. And if you can keep that young ward of mine somewhere near the middle of the road—" He broke off and continued with less certainty. "By the way, I wonder if I may ask, as a friend to you both, whether Dorinda is showing any tendency to settle down."

"She's quiet enough at present," David reminded him with a forced grin.

"Quite so, poor girl. But I was somewhat shocked—you don't mind my saying so—when I heard that those particularly disreputable associates of hers, who call themselves Black Butterflies, were with you at the hospital."

"They came after Mrs. Bradley left, to see if they could do anything for us—a friendly impulse, of course."

"I know; but they remained for days; and the general impression seems to be that it will take Adneyport

some time to get over their visit. My boy," he earnestly added, "you really ought to have kicked them out."

"Of course I wanted to," David wearily admitted. "But my position was rather difficult."

"Yes, undoubtedly." Looking at the youth before him, Hatch experienced a throb of sympathy. Here was no triumphant bridegroom, but a wan and depressed boy, suffering the reactions of his injuries, no doubt, but harassed, too, by the sense of unlooked-for responsibilities.

"You must keep the upper hand, you know," Hatch suddenly reminded him, under the influence of this discovery. "That's very important."

The bridegroom grinned again.

"I'll try to keep it, if I ever get it," he said, and returned to his work.

As he himself expressed it, he had always liked to get his "teeth into a job," but never before to-day had he fully realized the fine qualities of work as an anodyne. There was a mass of it waiting for him. In another mood, or in other conditions, he might have resented the accumulation which all three partners had unloaded on his desk. Now he dug into it zestfully, philosophically ignoring his useless arm, resenting every interruption, even the cordial welcomes of his associates who came to shake hands and congratulate him on his marriage and his convalescence from the accident. Kimball surprised him by taking him out to lunch.

David was glad to go, glad to listen to "shop talk," gladdest of all that he had told Dorinda, during his brief pause at her bedside after breakfast, that he would make a practice of lunching downtown on weekdays. He could n't go back to that house at noon; and yet, oddly, he wanted to go. He was haunted by the look on Dorinda's face, by the expression in her eyes when she had asked for the month's truce, and by the memory of the hand she had suddenly slipped into his, undoubtedly to impress Miss Allen, when he was leaving.

"I 'm coming down to dinner to-night," she told him. "Miss Allen thinks I can. And I 'll ask Doctor Warren to stay if he comes in about six, which seems to be his favorite hour."

David was relieved. Evidently she was no more anxious than he for a tête-à-tête.

He went home at six, very tired. His arm had been an increasing nuisance, which surprised him. He had accepted the constant pain of the first few days as inevitable, but he had expected improvement before this. He passed his door and went on to the second door of Dorinda's sitting-room, which, like his own, opened from the hall. The nurse greeted him with a care-free face.

"I 'm dressing Mrs. Goddard for dinner," she explained, stepping back from the threshold, "but I suppose—"

"No, no; I 'll come in after I 'm dressed, and help

her downstairs," David said, and hurried away before she could reply. That accident certainly had messed things up for them in every way, and not the least of its irritating aftermaths was that it had placed them in such difficult positions under so many strange eyes. The voice of the nurse followed him along the hall. He returned.

"Mrs. Goddard says to tell you that Doctor Warren is coming to dinner, and Doctor Warren mentioned when he was leaving this morning that he would get here about half-past six and examine your arm."

"Thanks."

David swung back to his own quarters, where Annie had evidently preceded him. Lights and fire were lit and as the last detail of the pleasing picture a decanter on the smoking-table held Scotch whisky, a syphon of soda, and highball glasses. David mixed himself a modest drink and, raising his glass, solemnly pledged Annie. He must tell her not to do that again, but tonight he needed a highball. The broken arm was throbbing like an ulcerated tooth, and the continued pain was putting his nerves on edge. He was glad Warren was coming in to look at the thing.

The drink comforted him and he sent for Johnny and made his toilet, but with increasing difficulty. Odd how much worse the arm had got during the day, he reflected after the boy had gone. Probably it had been hurt by his unconscious movements when he forgot the injury in his absorption in work. No doubt it would



be all right in the morning. But Doctor Warren, buoyantly entering thirty minutes later in the impressive formality of evening clothes, soon banished this fair hope. His examination, at first perfunctory and plainly based on the theory that nature was effectually looking after the break, took on a seriousness that clouded the cheerful expectancy of a hungry man now within fifteen minutes of a good meal.

"Tell me, Goddard," he asked abruptly, when the patient had answered a few questions, "did n't they take an X-ray of this arm at Adneyport?"

"No, they decided that was n't necessary—that it was a case of clean fracture, without complications."

"If they're not wrong I'll eat these splints!"

Warren's tone showed that he was divided between sympathy for his patient and the pleasant excitement of a physician who has caught other doctors napping.

"I'm awfully sorry, old chap, but I think this arm will have to be broken again. I'll telephone Wheeler and arrange to have an X-ray taken right after dinner. I'll make him develop it to-night; and if it shows what I think it will we'll do up the whole job early to-morrow morning."

"Break the arm again, you mean?" David demanded with natural reluctance.

"Yes. There's a nasty look about it, and I don't want to take any chances. When did you eat last?"

"About one o'clock."

"You can't have another mouthful. You'll proba-

bly have to take ether about eight in the morning. You may come to the table, though, and watch me eat, if you 're altruistic enough to enjoy that. I used to dine here once in a while in the old man's day—I was his doctor, you know—and I hear the cooking has n't fallen off any."

Warren was not so unfeeling as he sounded. He was merely giving the patient time to collect himself after the jolt he had received.

David spoke from a parched throat. More bad luck. There seemed no end to his bad luck.

"This is going to knock me out again, is n't it?" he asked, at last.

"Not long. Only for a few days or a week. After that you can get around as you're doing now, till the bone knits, which it ought to do in about three weeks. In the meantime, it will give you a good excuse to stay at home this week and keep your wife company," the doctor grinned. As this prospect did not appear to cheer the patient, he offered further solace.

"I see you have some whisky here," he said, picking up the decanter. "You can have a small drink, if you like."

"Thanks. I had one when I came in. Help yourself."

"I bet you needed it," Warren suggested, as he accepted the invitation. "That arm must be hurting like the devil." He set down his empty glass. "Is n't

that the dinner-gong? All right, let's go in and help Mrs. Goddard downstairs. I'll do the work and you can furnish the moral uplift. I'm not sure she ought to be up, but she's getting pretty restless and the change will help."

"Hold on." David caught the physician's arm as the latter started for the door. "Don't tell my wife anything about this arm till after dinner, will you?"

Warren nodded.

"I suppose that's best. But won't she notice that you're not eating?"

"I'll explain that I had a big lunch. It happens to be true. Kimball blew me off to-day," David explained. But their elaborate unconsciousness aroused Dorinda's suspicions.

"What have you two been doing in there all this time?" she demanded.

"Having a drink and letting Warren do his daily dozen on my arm," David told her. "He seemed to think it was a horizontal bar."

He walked to where she stood near the door, supported by the nurse, and bending, lightly kissed her cheek.

"Have you had a good day?" he asked sympathetically.

"Yes."

As she spoke Dorinda turned her face away, but not until he had seen the wave of color that flooded it even through the remaining congestion. His black eye-

brows lifted above his blue eyes. He was sorry he had annoyed her, but one had to put up some sort of bluff before these outsiders. She was looking stunning, in the same gown she had worn at the Christmas party. He had admired it at the time and had told her so. To-night nothing mattered much, though, except that infernal pain in his arm, which was steadily growing worse. With the nurse on one side of her and the doctor on the other, Dorinda slowly descended the wide staircase, and David followed in silence. A little sensitive, the nurse and doctor decided,—and quite naturally so, poor lad,—over his inability to help her himself.

At the table his failure to eat reawakened Dorinda's suspicions. He mentioned the luncheon and gave in detail an elaborate menu.

"I don't believe you had half those things," Dorinda said, with the candor she had caught from the Butterflies. "You're thinking of some feast of Lucullus you have read about, or of the supper that was spread on the girl's counterpane in 'The Eve of St. Agnes.' I believe you two have been cooking up something. What's the matter with him?" she added sharply, catching a look that passed between the men. David answered.

"My arm has been bothering me a little," he said casually, "and we're going to have a pretty picture made of it after dinner. Warren wants it for his album."

"Oh, then something is wrong!" Dorinda cried.

Their eyes met. He had never seen quite that look in hers before, and under it his own dropped. The nurse and doctor also exchanged a swift glance. This was certainly hard luck for those two. Warren began to talk with the ease of a man used to meeting "moments" in life, and Dorinda said no more. But she ate almost as little as her husband, and when the four had left the table, after a dinner which only the nurse and the physician had enjoyed, she asked a question before they were out of the dining-room.

"Are they coming here to take the X-ray?"

"No, I've arranged to take Goddard to Wheeler's office," Warren told her. "But he may have an uncomfortable night, and there's a big chance that we'll do some surgical work early in the morning. So I'm going to ask you—" he turned to Miss Allen—"to keep an eye on him. Of course I'll leave him a sedative. Can you help in the morning, or shall I bring another nurse with me?"

"Oh, how utterly useless I am!" Dorinda's outburst was so unexpected that they all started. "If I were any good at all I could help, too." She pulled herself together and went on more quietly. "Of course Miss Allen will give you her time to-morrow, and as long as you need her."

"Thanks awfully, but that won't be long," David hurriedly assured them. "It makes me horribly nervous to be waited on. I never was in my life, you see,

and I can't get used to it. Besides, Doctor Warren says I'll be around in a day or two."

"A few days," Warren corrected, "and then only around the house. I'll telephone Hatch not to expect you for a week."

"No—thanks again—but I'll do that." David's pale face burned under a sudden realization. More money to be borrowed from Hatch! He was feeling physically ill from the combined pain and strain of this new situation.

Warren, whose manner throughout dinner had been that of a man with eons before him, now revealed a brisk efficiency.

"I'll run you down in my car," he told his patient, "and we'd better start right away. It won't take long, and we'll probably be back before Mrs. Goddard goes upstairs. I want you to get to bed early and take a dose that will give you some sleep."

Dorinda followed them out into the hall where the coats and hats of the men hung. Bracing her hands against David's chest, she stood close to him, looking up.

"I'm most awfully sorry you've got to go through this," she said in a low voice, "and that I can't help even a little bit."

In the background the doctor and the nurse considerately turned their backs on the tableau, while they made their plans for the morning.

"All that worries me," David assured her, "is that

I'll be such a nuisance here, with doctors trafling in and out and all that sort of thing. But I suppose it would n't do to go to the hospital for a day or two," he added, with sudden hope.

"It certainly would n't," Dorinda spoke firmly. "We can give you a hospital right here, if you need one. Of course you will come in and tell me about everything before you go to bed."

"Of course."

David walked out of the house on unwilling feet. One thought obsessed him. X-ray pictures were expensive—ten dollars or more, he had heard—and he had n't enough money in his pocket to pay for the one to be made to-night. Borrowing from Dorinda was unthinkable. He had banished the suggestion almost before it entered his mind. He must find some plan of payment before he reached Wheeler's office. If only he had borrowed a little more from Hatch! But this was Tuesday, and his salary check would be due Saturday. He had told himself the few dollars left in his pockets would carry him till then . . .

Warren chatted genially, thinking the young man's obvious gloom was due to the prospect of the next morning, as well it might be. As they turned into Wheeler's street, David started impressively.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, "I forgot to bring any money."

Warren looked at him.

"Pretty jumpy, are n't you?" he asked. (David had



rather overdone that start.) "What do you need money for?"

"I've got to pay for that X-ray picture, have n't I? And I have n't more than a few dollars in my pocket."

"Can the prima-donna stuff," Warren lightly advised. "You don't have to pay for them to-night."

"But there's to-morrow morning, too," David went on restlessly, for here was another detail that was disturbing him. "I'll need money then, I suppose. You've sprung this thing on me so suddenly I have n't had time to turn around. I could have gone to the bank to-day, if I had known in time."

He could, but the journey would have been fruitless. He would have found there only the grieved eyes and the I-told-you-so expression of his increasingly depressed friend Jeffreys.

"Forget it," Warren suggested. "You won't need money except for the anæsthetist, and I'll pay him and put the charge on my bill. I'll pay Wheeler, too. Now stop fussing and quiet down."

It was easier to stop fussing after that. Nevertheless, the victim made a mental calculation. Ten dollars, say, for the X-ray, ten more probably, for the anæsthetist, twenty-five to Warren for the pleasure of having his arm re-broken. Fifteen or twenty more for professional calls afterward, not to speak of a couple of days' wages for Miss Allen—he'd see that it was n't more than that. The whole business would smash another hundred for him. How hellish it was to be poor,

and what idiotic short-sightedness he had shown in using up his entire savings-bank account in that ghastly farce of a courtship! Yet, looking back over the weeks preceding his marriage, he did not see how he could have acted differently. He stiffened into attention. Warren was repeating a question.

"You 're not worrying about this thing, are you?"

David forced a casual tone.

"No, but you must admit that it's rather a right to the jaw, in these conditions. And I can't feel that there's much excuse for those people at Adneyport."

"It does look that way," Warren conceded, "but of course . . ." His abrupt stop at Wheeler's door made it possible for him to stop his sentence as abruptly, which was a relief to him. "He's all ready for us," he announced with an appreciative glance at the specialist's lighted windows, and he led the way with the buoyancy of the onlooker in such situations.

Wheeler proved gratifyingly expeditious. It was after nine when they reached his office, not yet ten when they left it, and only slightly past ten when they reentered the Maxwell house.

"I want to see you in your crib before I leave," Warren announced, "but we'll look in on Mrs. Goddard first, of course, and ease her mind."

They found Dorinda in bed, staring with resentful eyes into the restful gloom of her room.

"I wanted to stay up till you came," she complained, "but Miss Allen would n't let me."

"I was afraid there might be some delay; and she's very nervous to-night," Miss Allen explained; "blaming herself for everything, of course," she added to the doctor in an undertone.

"Bed's the best place for 'em both," Warren oracularly decreed, after he had briefly explained the situation. "When you remember that it was only a week ago yesterday you got your injuries, perhaps you'll realize that you're still semi-invalids. So follow the poet's advice—kiss her good-by and go," he urged David.

David advanced gingerly. In his high-strung, nervous condition, with that infernal arm raising Cain, as he mentally put it, this sort of thing seemed the turn of the screw. He kissed the discolored cheek, which was now improving from day to day, and this time she took the caress as perfunctorily as it was given.

"Shy, bless their hearts, and no wonder," Miss Allen reflected as she gave her courteous attention to the scene; but Warren told himself there was something queer here. Surely a fine young couple like this was could accept in a sportsmanlike spirit the misfortune that had overtaken them both; yet there was an evident constraint between them which he had observed every time he saw them together.

"I'll toddle off," David said. "This arm is bothering me a lot."

But Dorinda did not release his right hand, which she had taken when he came to her side.

"Kiss me again before you go," she murmured, and added, "I'm *so* sorry!"

This time it was David who flushed, though he realized that the request meant merely recognition of the truce, combined with a passing sympathy. To all the Butterflies, kissing meant little or nothing. Both Chad and Jim had kissed Dorinda in the hospital every time they came and went, and occasionally when there was not even that excuse for the salute. He recalled Chad's airy reception of satisfactory bulletins about the patient:

"Excellent, Dorinda! You may kiss me if you wish, as of course you do. But don't draw it out too long."

Dorinda usually ignored the invitation; or if Chad's faun-like face was near as he offered it, she gave his cheek a perfunctory touch. David did the Butterflies the justice of admitting that their caresses were never long drawn out. Neither were they fervent. They were a typical expression of the Black-Butterfly attitude toward all things in life save Beauty—an attitude casual, detached, almost remote. Nevertheless, David had disliked seeing those caresses, as he disliked any other weak imitation of real things that were worth while. He had always thought that a real kiss, given under the right conditions to the right girl, would be one of the things most worth while, but of course he did n't know. His own life held no caresses. He now kissed Dorinda's cheek, which was the part of her face his lips happened to touch, gave her a pale wraith of

his usual smile, and left the room. In his sitting-room he turned to Warren, who had followed him, and spoke almost fiercely:

"Say, old man, you've simply got to give me something for this arm. I've about reached my limit."

"Don't I know? We'll hurry your clothes off."

But when the doctor would have shepherded him into bed, the young man shook his head.

"Too jumpy," he protested. "Give me your dose and leave me here by the fire. I'll go to bed when it begins to take effect. And, Doctor," he added urgently, "please tell Miss Allen not to come snooping into my room during the night. If I want her I'll call her. I'll never fall asleep if I can't have any privacy. The key is in Dorinda's room, of course, so lock the door on that side, and tell the nurse I'll be all right till morning."

"I'm not sure you will be. I'm afraid you're going to have a night of it. But I'll do as you say. Here are the tablets. Swallow one now—that's right—and repeat the dose in an hour if you have to. It's just eleven. Take the second at twelve. That ought to send you off. I'd rather you didn't take a third, though of course I don't want you to lie and curse till morning. So long."

He departed, and David, having replenished the fire from the carved-oak box Johnny had filled with hickory logs, sat staring into the blaze, reviewing the events of the day. The backward vista was more re-

assuring than the one immediately before him. He ran over the interview with Hatch; he'd better borrow another two hundred from Hatch, since there was no telling what he was in for. There was little cheer in that prospect, beyond the definite one of knowing that of course Hatch would let him have the money. He thought of his mother, wondering if she could have helped him with some of his present problems. He was sure she could, for she had been a woman of sound judgment; but the speculation was an idle one, for of course if she had lived, this situation would not have come up. She would never have let him put himself into any such position. . . .

The tall clock in the corner struck twelve. He must have dozed a trifle, for he was stiff and cramped and the pain was beginning again. He took a second tablet from the box on the table beside him and gulped it down. Codein, probably. Anyway, it made a fellow feel a little better—

The door leading from his sitting-room to Dorinda's bedroom yawned quietly. But he heard it and sat up with a jerk, staring at the girl as she tiptoed toward him across the floor.

"I just woke," she explained in a low voice, as he rose. "When I saw your light I knew you were n't asleep. Miss Allen is, so I came in to see if you needed anything."

"Not a thing, thanks. But you must n't stay here." In his urgency he took her arm with his free hand to



propel her toward the door, but she gently released it.

"Why must n't I?" she asked coolly.

"Why . . . why . . . because . . ." He was still too much surprised and dazed to think quickly or to say the right thing. As he hesitated, she swung another chair toward the fire, close beside his, and sat down in it, drawing the folds of an amber-silk dressing-gown around her knees. Her bare feet were thrust into bedroom slippers, and her bobbed hair, ruffled by her pillow, stood out around her head. She looked like a sleepy child.

"Put some more logs on the fire," she directed. "It is n't very warm here."

He mechanically fed the dying fire and then stopped before her.

"Dorinda," he said, desperately, "you really must n't stay here. Surely you realize that."

She looked patient.

"Don't be silly," she said. "Sit down. I want to talk to you."

He set his teeth.

"We can't talk now."

"I'd like to know why we can't. But first get me a quilt or something to wrap around me. You might get me the new dressing-gown you've spurned," she added with a glance at the red bath-robe.

"Surely you did n't come in here to talk about dressing-gowns," he jerked out.



"Of course I did n't. How queerly you act! Wait—what are you doing?"

He had moved to the other door and now he tapped it gently. A quick stir and movement proved that Miss Allen had sprung from her couch. He opened the door.

"Oh, Miss Allen," he said quietly. "I'm awfully sorry to disturb you, but I've taken the second of those tablets and the pain is n't any better. Mrs. Goddard just heard me floundering around here, and she's trying to help me, but of course she must n't stay up—"

"I should say not!" Miss Allen earnestly corroborated, hurrying into the room and drawing her dressing-gown around her as she came.

"What I want to know," David went on, "is whether I can take another of those tablets right away. I've had two, and my wife was afraid to have me take another without asking you."

"Wait a minute, till I get Mrs. Goddard back into bed. Then I'll come and fix you up. Child, what were you thinking of? You might have caught your death of cold!" She hustled Dorinda toward the door, and the girl yielded with a grimace at David, which he met composedly.

"She has n't had time to catch cold," he said as he followed the pair to the door. "But of course she hated to leave me when she knew I was in such pain. Good night, darling," he added tenderly.

She made another grimace—the raised lip and up-turned nose of a street urchin—and he responded with a forgiving pat on her shoulder. Then he returned to the fire, feeling uplifted. Of course she was furious, but she deserved a little discipline for an idiotic performance like that. He had been a match for her, thank Heaven, and the good-humored grimace had been her acknowledgment that she deserved what she got. He was learning how to manage that young person. Not even the somewhat fussy ministrations of Miss Allen dimmed his content. She gave him a third tablet, accepted his statement that he was still too nervous to lie down, and finally reluctantly left him in the big chair before his fire, on his fervent promise that he would go to bed within an hour.

The effect of the third tablet was soothing. This time he knew he had dozed, and when he sat up in response to a sudden whimper from Freckles the fire was again burning low. He decided to go to bed. But first he would quiet Freckles, who had keenly resented being taken out of Dorinda's room and put in his box at ten o'clock and who doubtless had re-awakened to a sense of his wrongs. David went to the hall and calmed the nervous puppy with a low word or two and a few head strokes. Then, on an impulse he did not stop to analyze, he went to the top of the staircase and looked down. Afterward he told himself he must have heard the noise that awakened Freckles, or caught the reflection of light under the

library door as he walked along the hall. Anyway, there was a line of light there now. Annie might have forgotten to turn off the electric current after Dorinda and the nurse went upstairs. But even as the thought came, he knew better. The subconscious sense that warns us of the unusual awoke in him. He crept downstairs, approached the door with great caution, opened it without a sound, closed it with equal care, and for an instant stood with his back to it, surveying the scene before him. Then he spoke.

"Well, Jim," he asked conversationally, "what's the idea?"

The young man who stood before the old desk, frantically rummaging through its numerous drawers, whirled as if the words had been a physical force swinging him about. His face turned a bluish white, and though his lips moved it was clear that he could not speak. The new master of the house walked slowly toward him, holding the other's panic-filled eyes.

"What's the idea?" he repeated. "A Raffles stunt?"

"Something like it," Bryant stammered. Then, as if the other's calm proved infectious, he began to pull himself together and came forward, an apprehensive eye on the outline of his host's right hand, doubled in the pocket of the red bath-robe. It was David's pet attitude,—he was always shoving his hands into the pockets of any garment that had side pockets,—but he understood the anxiety of that eye. Bryant thought he had a weapon there, that he had entered the room

armed. It might be well to foster the notion. Unhandicapped, he could have handled several Jim Bryants; but with a broken arm . . .

"You won't give me away, will you?" Bryant was muttering. "I have n't taken anything."

"You were going to, were n't you?"

"Of course I was, if I could find it. But the damned thing's empty! It was n't two weeks ago I saw a big roll when Dorinda opened the desk one evening."

David nodded.

"She put that money in the bank, not knowing you would need it."

"Oh, drop that sort of talk, Goddard!" Bryant spoke with the passion of desperation. "I know how you're visualizing yourself in this picture," he went on. "The virtuous citizen aroused from his innocent slumbers by a marauder of the night, and ready to show how cool he is and how good at repartee before he turns the wretch over to the law. But it's not going to be that way this time."

"Is n't it?"

"No. You see, I have n't taken anything."

"Not to-night, apparently. But perhaps these little calls are habits of yours that I ought to break up."

"Wrong again. I've never been here before, on an errand like this, or anywhere else, either. You can take that or leave it."

"I'll take it."

David did not know why he believed Bryant, but he did believe him. Also, incredibly, he was sorry for the man, whose whole look showed that he was up against something stark. The panic in Bryant's eyes, Goddard now realized, had nothing to do with the perils of the present situation. He had been afraid of those, but only for a fleeting moment. This was fear of life.

"What's it all about?" he added. "Come over here and tell me."

Bryant accepted the invitation; that is, he came over to the fireplace in which a few embers still glowed among the ashes, and rested his elbow on the mantel, staring down at the coals. He seemed to have forgotten the hand in the pocket, for his gaze swept indifferently past it.

"It's nothing new," he said, with some return to his natural manner, "but it's new to me. I need money, a lot of money, and I've got to have it. You may remember that I tried to borrow some from you on the train yesterday."

"I remember. I did n't have any. I have n't any yet. I suppose," David added, "it has n't occurred to you that you could go to work?"

The sound Bryant uttered was an unpleasant one—half a laugh, half a sob.

"Oh, yes, it has," he said. "I've spent the day looking for a job. Of course they all laughed at me," he added in the flat tones of utter helplessness. "I

suppose they could n't believe I was in earnest. Anyway, every one sent me to some one else."

"Would a few dollars help?"

"They 'd buy some food. We . . . I . . . have n't eaten since I left you yesterday."

"Great Scott! I never dreamed you got down to that sort of thing. Come into the dining-room and have a drink, while I rustle something from the ice-box."

Goddard hurried into the dining-room, and Bryant, following him, went directly to the sideboard with which he was so familiar. He poured a drink and swallowed it.

"I 'll go into the kitchen with you," he volunteered. "I know more about where things are than you do."

"I 'll bet you do," David agreed. "I don't know where anything is."

Bryant proceeded to make good his claim of familiarity. He foraged in the ice-box, found cold meat, bread, and butter, and made some sandwiches. He put two oranges in his pockets, and, looking about, discovered a sheet of newspaper left in the wood-box for aid in fire-making. In this he wrapped the sandwiches and a bottle of milk.

"I 'll eat these things when I get home," he explained. "May I take some cigarettes, too?"

"Of course."

Bryant thrust a handful of cigarettes into his breast

pocket, explaining with a short laugh that he had pawned the new case for the trip to Adneyport.

David nodded. He had noticed in the hospital that none of the Butterflies carried one of the new cases. The fact had touched him, for he understood its meaning.

"Eat something while I run upstairs and get what little money I have," he suggested.

"Bring down a small bottle. I'd like to take home some whisky," Bryant mentioned.

David obeyed, marveling at himself as he descended the stairs with the bottle and the handful of loose change. God knows he had no money to lend to any one. Least of all had he money to lend to this wastrel who had come to rob and was going away laden with benefactions.

"Only three dollars and fifty cents," he confessed, as he handed over the contribution. "All I have except a little carfare."

Jim took it with a nod.

"Thanks," he said. "I'm off. I may as well go the way I came, I suppose—through a kitchen window I took the precaution to break the catch of before I left last night."

David raised his eyebrows. He was following blind instinct, an instinct which told him he was in the presence of something unusual; but deep within him was sardonic appreciation of the irony of this situa-



tion. At the window Bryant paused. For the first time an element of self-consciousness entered his manner.

"Good night, then," he jerked out.

"Good night—unless there's something you want to tell me."

But Bryant shied away from the suggestion like a nervous horse.

"Not a thing. Good night."

David closed the window after him, fastening it by slipping a case-knife firmly between the upper and the lower sash, and went upstairs. Apparently the little episode had done him good, or else the third tablet was cumulatively effective. He threw off the red bath-robe, got into bed, and almost immediately fell asleep.

## CHAPTER XV

**T**O Goddard the experiences of the next two days were a nightmare with an undercurrent of physical pain. He had a healthy man's distaste for sick-rooms and their accompaniments, combined with pride in his own excellent condition and the subconscious theory that most of the ills which befall human beings are the result of their ignorance or carelessness. He could not reasonably blame himself for his present sufferings, though he now realized that he should have borne the pain of his arm less heroically. If he had confided his symptoms to Parker, much trouble could have been avoided, but he had thought them the usual developments of broken arms, to be endured with such philosophy as one could bring to bear on them.

He had never before taken ether, and obviously he was the type that does not receive it hospitably. For twenty-four hours after the operation he was in an ether-reeking, nausea-filled world, and during this period he determinedly joined that growing army of heroes who object to the presence of ministering angels and of cool hands on fevered brows. All he wanted was to be let alone, and he said so.

Toward night he revived to a condition in which he regarded hot tea with favor, and consented to the five-minute visit from his bride which Miss Allen plainly regarded as the proper thing. His mental processes were not yet quite normal, but he gathered the impression that Dorinda was less of a nuisance in a sick-room than most persons would be. She was quiet, she did not sit on the side of his bed, she did not coo at him. Neither did she assure him in loud and cheerful tones that he would be perfectly all right the next morning. She looked down at him soberly, and mentioned that she was glad he felt better. She also drew the shade over a window whose light was too much in his eyes, spoke of the cooling effects of the orange-juice to be given a little later on, and then, with admirable tact, left him. David fell asleep thinking well of her.

On the second day he was up and sitting in the big arm-chair before the fire in his sitting-room, greatly admired by the house staff. Even Kate stole from the lower regions to see him, on pretext of discussing the relative merits of chops and sweetbreads for luncheon, while Johnny and Freckles came in to show him a rubbed spot on the puppy's neck, which both forgot all about when the audience was granted. It was already clear that however Miss Maxwell's marriage was regarded by the townspeople, it had made a distinct hit with her servants. None of them had enjoyed feminine rule, though all admitted that this one was always just and often generous. They wanted "a man in

the house," and here was one much to their taste; for, master though he was, he gave orders in the form of requests and was "that appreciative of good service he'd bring tears to your eyes." This tribute was Annie's.

Also, he was unquestionably popular outside of the house—"Will you listen to the telephone ringin' all day long?"—and very easy to look at, especially to-day, when his black hair so effectively set off his pallor, and he was framed in the soft beauty of the new dressing-gown. It was becoming clear that the model young man, as the Butterflies called him, had an unusually large number of friends. In addition to the numerous inquiries that came over the telephone, and cards left at the door, messenger-boys brought several baskets of fruit and boxes of cigars, and the town's leading florist had difficulty in filling orders for flowers. The romance of the elopement, the tragedy of the accident, and the hard luck of the re-broken arm had dispelled the townspeoples' temporary disapproval.

Dorinda was the patient's first caller after Doctor Warren had made his morning visit, and this time she lingered a little longer, but revealed the same fine technique. David now understood that this technique was the result of long experience. She had been brought up in a sick-room, poor girl. In one of their few exchanges of confidences, she admitted as much. She asked none of the usual sick-room questions. She had learned from Warren all she needed to know—that conditions were now satisfactory and that complete

recovery of the abused arm was merely a matter of time. At a little before twelve o'clock, while she was still in the room, they had another caller, who asked for them both. Hatch had left his office early to look in on the invalids before lunch. David would have preferred to see him alone. They had certain business details to discuss. But the senior partner was plainly gratified by the pleasing domestic scene awaiting him, in which a subdued but charming Dorinda ministered with pretty impartiality to her guest and her bridegroom. Hatch smoked and talked for an hour, to his own great surprise. He declined an invitation to remain to luncheon, but promised to come to dinner as soon as they both recovered. Incidentally, he gave them the local news, and mentioned among other bits that Judge Davis and Norma had returned. Norma, it appeared, had not been very well.

When he was leaving, he handed David a long envelop.

"A little business matter," he said kindly, "to look over at your leisure."

David looked it over the moment Dorinda left the room. It was a check for two hundred and fifty dollars, rubbing cheeks with a promissory note for the amount with interest at five per cent and giving David till the end of the year to make the initial payment. David's heart rose in a voiceless anthem to Hatch. Hatch *was* a peach! In his uplifted mood he was ready to die for Hatch.

In the afternoon David had more callers. Dick and Alice Bradley dropped in about five and had tea with their host and hostess in David's sitting-room, which, now that the invalid was able to endure the scent of the flowers, was beginning to look very gay. It was David's day, his atmosphere, almost his house, and his young heart swelled under the comfort and normality of it. The Bradleys admired the sitting-room, the new dressing-gown, and David's morale; he was now in his usual spirits. They even admired Dorinda's face, whose coloring they assured her added a piquant touch of drama to her appearance. Her complexion was beginning to look almost normal. The swelling had gone down, and the sole discoloration now was around the eyes—giving them that effect of "eyes set in with dirty fingers," so much approved by artists.

The Bradleys were gay and friendly. They had plans for the future—a dinner for the Goddards, and immediate membership in the Country Club. They had been worrying David on that point for some time, they reminded him, but he had always side-stepped. Now he and his wife must join at once. The Bradleys would arrange it. David agreed with thanks, before Dorinda could speak. He knew the Bradleys could arrange it. Dick was president of the club, and Alice was on the membership committee.

When the Bradleys left, Dorinda remained with David, but she seemed restless. She roamed about, giving unneeded touches to the flowers, and finally she

went to the window and stood for a long time with her back to the room, staring out at the winking darkness. At last she flung over her shoulder the question that filled her mind:

"Don't you think it's odd that Kitty and Chad and Jim have n't been near us for three days?"

David admitted that it was odd. He did not add his inner conviction that in his case it was a heart-warming instance of the wind tempered to the shorn lamb, but Dorinda read the thought.

"Of course it does n't matter to you," she began rather sharply, and then stopped and bit her lip. "I mean," she added in a different tone, "that naturally you don't mind, because you don't care for them as I do. But there has n't been a time since they began to come here when they've stayed away for three whole days. What do you suppose it means?"

David followed her mental processes as clearly as if they had been printed on the opposite wall. It had been his day and she had felt out of it. His friends, his interests, his atmosphere filled the house, and its mistress was lonely.

"I think it's easy to understand," he said. "For one reason, they've had a pretty stiff dose of us lately, you know, and they may be fed up. For another, they must have heard, since the whole town seems to know about it, that I've been knocked out and that the house is full of ether. That's enough to keep any one away. I don't believe the Butterflies go in much for sick-



rooms," he went on, conversationally. "I'd say every instinct of theirs is against it, so it was really fine of Kitty and Chad and Jim to stand almost three days at the Adneyport hospital. It would be only natural if now they think they had enough."

"I suppose that's it; of course it is." As if the tribute to them, the first he had ever offered, had touched her, Dorinda came and sat beside him.

"But that does n't explain Norma," she went on, depressedly. "You heard Mr. Hatch say she's back."

"I know. I'm surprised at Norma, myself."

"Probably they were back when we got home," Dorinda went on. "They must have heard about the accident, and about this new trouble with your arm. They're both your friends, and Norma and I really loved each other. Yet she has n't even telephoned."

"I can't understand it," he admitted.

She stood up, on one of the swift impulses she always followed as swiftly as they came.

"I'm going to telephone her. Do you mind if I telephone right here?"

"Of course not. But . . . do you think it's a good idea?"

"Why is n't it?"

"I'm not sure it is n't; I'm just asking. Why not think about it a bit?"

"If I do I won't telephone. I'd rather have it over."

She hurried to the telephone and gave the number,

while he watched her in silence. Perhaps she was right. As he had said, he did n't know. She spoke:

"Hello. Is that you, Margaret? This is Miss Maxwell . . . I mean Mrs. David Goddard." Over the instrument she made one of her little gamin grimaces at him, in recognition of the slip. Something about the episode gave him a new sensation, fleeting yet strong. "I'd like to speak to Miss Davis, please," Dorinda was saying. "Is she in? Yes, thank you, I'll hold the line."

She nodded to David, and her lips formed almost noiseless words:

"She's in. Now . . . we'll see!"

There was a wait—possibly a slightly longer wait than would have been natural. Then Dorinda's voice again:

"Hello. Is that you, Norma? Oh, I'm so glad! I've just heard you're back. Yes . . . yes . . ."

A pause, filled with the sound of a murmuring wire. Then Dorinda's voice:

"Yes, it was a nasty mess, but we're all right again; that is, I am, and David's going to be. I suppose you've heard that he had to have his arm broken over again yesterday morning."

More of the murmuring wire. Dorinda continued:

"That's sweet of you, dear. Of course we know—" A rising excitement sharpened her voice. "You are! Really! Norma, I'm so sorry! I had n't taken that in at all; I thought you just went South for pleasure;

and here I've been prattling about our affairs . . . But surely you're coming to see us before you sail, are n't you? We'd both love . . . Yes, I know . . . of course. Well, then, why not to-night? David's sitting up now, as fresh as paint, but I know I'm boring him to death." The phrase fell from her lips in an unconscious but perfect imitation of Alice Bradley's casual lilt. "Can't you come in and cheer us both? Why, of course he's up to it; he's been seeing people all day—the Bradleys and Mr. Hatch. No, he is n't a bit tired . . . Yes . . . yes. . . ."

It was plain that the girl at the other end was not accepting the invitation with alacrity; that, indeed, she was, as the Bradleys would put it, "side-stepping." With growing interest, the observer watched Dorinda's face, which alternately lit and darkened as if lights were playing over it. At the end it was dark.

"That's splendid. Could n't you come to dinner, at seven? We're having it upstairs, of course. Not possible? Oh, well, at eight o'clock, then. I'm so glad we'll get at least a glimpse of you. Good-by . . . Good-by."

She set down the instrument and gave him a synopsis of the discussion in seven words: "She'll come; but she does n't want to."

As he took this in silence, she crossed to the fire and stood looking down into it.

"Norma's going abroad," she told David, without turning. "That's why they came home. They're

sailing Saturday." She stood silent for a moment and then went on: "I'm perfectly sure she had n't the faintest idea of coming here, or the least notion of picking up our friendship. At the end she gave way because they're going to be gone a year and she did n't think one little visit would make any difference. But . . . she's through with me!"

"I think you're a little morbid about this," David said gently. He could n't bear to see that look on her face. He was so sorry for her that his throat ached.

"We heard that Norma has been ill," he went on, "though we did n't realize it was serious. People who can afford it are always running South to cure slight colds. Evidently she was really under the weather, and she has n't got entirely well, so they're trying Europe. All that's clear enough, and it's pretty easy to imagine how Norma feels—discouraged, down and out, perhaps even badly frightened about herself. Or she may be having one of the cases of nerves girls seem to be going in for more than ever these days. Anyway, she's up against something. She does n't want to see any one or go anywhere. I think you'll find the explanation of her manner is that she has n't given us a thought, one way or the other. She's in the pit of invalidism—and it's a mighty lonesome place."

Dorinda nodded. Then she crossed back to his chair and stood looking down at him.

"I'm beginning to understand," she said, thoughtfully, "why you have the reputation of being such a

level-headed young man. Everything you say seems so plausible and so sane. I find myself accepting it with the most touching faith."

"I'll give myself away some day!" he laughed; but he was immensely pleased. He was also encouraged by the discovery that Dorinda planned to be on her best behavior during the truce. That quick recovery from her little slip this afternoon, as well as her whole manner and this new friendliness, proved it.

"I believe you're perfectly right about Norma, just as you are about Chad and Kitty and Jim," she went on. "I wish I could get into the way of reasoning things out as you do," she ended, almost wistfully, and added with a twinkle, "Perhaps you'll teach me."

"Don't try me too far," he lazily urged. "One more compliment and I'll start a class."

"I'll be its first member. Even as it is, you're teaching me a lot every day. Now I must get ready for dinner."

She left the room on that, and it was well. Both were becoming aware that the conversation could not continue much longer on this high level.

David's preparations for dinner were simple. He brushed his black hair till the wave was almost eliminated, and succeeded in wresting the cloth from Miss Allen and washing his face himself. She washed and dried his hands and he regarded them discontentedly. The nails were clean, of course, but they needed manicuring. He must see to that the first time he went

out. He was rather fussy about such things, for a law clerk; but, as it happened, his one small vanity was his hands, which had character and were unusually well shaped.

The agreeable atmosphere in which they had parted held triumphantly through the dinner-hour. It was not, however, an hour for private conversation. Miss Allen was at the table with them, and the ubiquitous Annie gave her usual perfect service, assisted by the excellent dumb-waiter installed during Mrs. Maxwell's long invalidism. David ate a little solid food, the first he had wanted since his ether experience, drank a glass of champagne, and enjoyed it. Vitality was rolling over him as those ether waves had rolled yesterday. It was a refreshing change.

When Judge Davis and Norma arrived at eight, the table had been cleared and put away, but the Goddards were still drinking their coffee, and looking over the cards that had been left during the day. There were dozens of these, and Annie reported that all the callers had left messages of sympathy for her master and mistress.

"You see?" David quietly pointed out. "They're all as friendly as neighbors could be, and ready to meet you more than half-way, if you will let them."

Dorinda ordered cigarettes, liqueurs, and extra cups and glasses, and sent Miss Allen down to escort the callers upstairs. Then she glanced at David with lifted eyebrows.



"Nothing was said about Judge Davis's coming," she reminded him.

"No, but I 'm glad he has come."

"So am I—of course."

The judge and Norma entered the room as casually as if they had been there the day before, and at first glance the change in Norma did not seem striking. She was thinner and looked older, but it was not until the little flush she wore during the greetings had faded that the observers realized how pale and hollow-eyed she really was. Both were shocked by the revelation and betrayed it by an increasing cheerfulness of manner. Norma's eyes, which seemed so much larger than ever before, passed Dorinda's face and touched the sling that held David's bandaged arm.

"You 've had a hard time, have n't you?" she softly asked him.

"Oh, for a few days. It 's all over now."

"I 'm glad of that. But you show it." Her eyes rose to his face.

"That 's the ether. I never was as sick in my life as that stuff made me. But it was n't a siege to arouse much sympathy." He skidded away from his ailments, a topic at no time agreeable to him. "And you, Norma. How about you?"

"I 'm quite all right."

Increasingly, she failed to look it. He hurriedly seated her in his own big chair, actually fearing that she 'd collapse if he did n't. He noticed that the



judge, though talking to Dorinda, was watching his daughter closely.

"It's the stairs," Norma explained. "I have n't been walking up and down many stairs lately."

"We should n't have asked it . . . we never dreamed . . ."

"I must get used to them again. I'm much better than I was, or I could n't have come home."

But still Norma's appearance failed to bear out her brave words. Gazing at her, wide-eyed, David thought of stories he had heard in his country boyhood—talks of "galloping consumption" among his neighbors. Norma's condition must be serious, he suddenly realized, to make Judge Davis drop everything and take her abroad for a year.

"I'm glad you're getting out of this climate," he said, under the influence of these reflections. "Where are you going?"

"To southern France, and Italy."

"That will be wonderful."

"Yes, I'm looking forward to it."

If she was, the view evidently held nothing she could see, for her eyes were blank. He felt increasingly uncomfortable. Dorinda came toward them, with the judge following.

"I think your father and David are longing for a talk," she told Norma, "and I know I want a talk with you. Let's go into my sitting-room—there's a fire there, too—and leave these two alone."

It was another of her swift impulses, and though David was relieved, he was not sure of its wisdom. He looked at Norma. For a moment it appeared that she would refuse the invitation. She hesitated, and her eyes reached out to her father as if seeking help or guidance. But for once his glance was not on her. He stood with his back to her, lighting the cigar David had offered him. Thrown on her own initiative, Norma shrugged thin shoulders.

"All right," she said indifferently. "But we can't stay long. I'm under orders to be in bed soon after nine."

She followed Dorinda from the room as she spoke, and David looked after them with a puzzled frown. It was like Dorinda to do a thing like that, regardless of whether others wanted it or not. She must learn to be less impulsive. Meeting the judge's eyes, he spoke with feeling.

"I was awfully sorry to hear that Norma had been ill," he said. "We did n't know anything about it till we got back. Is she pretty well over it?"

"She will be," the judge asserted with quiet conviction. "But it will take time," he went on. "There's nothing wrong organically, but she has had a bad nervous breakdown. Now tell me about yourself," he added with the evident purpose of changing the subject. "Is the arm getting along as it should?"

David followed his lead and repeated Warren's reassuring prediction, but he was increasingly hurt by

the other's manner. Now that his marriage had taken place, it would have been like Judge Davis to accept it philosophically and return to their old friendly footing. In the heart-leap of relief accompanying the judge's unexpected appearance David had told himself that was what the visit meant. Now he knew he was wrong. There was none of the old affection and intimacy in the manner of this courteous caller, who continued to chat agreeably on impersonal topics. Judge Davis was there because his daughter was there. That was all there was to it.

In her sitting-room Dorinda was passing through a similar experience with her former friend. She had seated Norma by the fire, had taken a chair facing her. Leaning forward, she seized the visitor's hand, instinctively trying to restore by the impulsive contact some of the old glamour she knew she had held for the other girl. For a moment the hand lay in hers. Then it was withdrawn, on the obvious pretext of readjusting a shell hairpin that needed no such attention. Dorinda shrank back, hurt by the rebuff, and caught at the only explanation that seemed possible.

"Does your father still object to me?" she asked almost timidly. "I hoped he would n't, now."

For what seemed a long time Norma did not answer. Instead, she sat staring into the fire; but Dorinda knew she had heard the question, and something in the overcharged atmosphere between them kept her from repeating it. At last Norma spoke.

"No more than I do," she said at last, without moving her eyes from the burning logs.

Dorinda stared at her. Then her quick temper rose.

"Norma!" she cried.

Norma looked at her, but not as if she were really seeing her.

"You asked me," she indifferently pointed out. "And you insisted on my coming here."

"I know, but . . . I don't understand."

"Of course you don't. You never have understood anything but your own wishes, Dorinda, and I don't suppose you ever will. From the time we first met I knew that."

It did not seem as if Norma were really speaking to her companion, but more as if she were dispassionately thinking aloud. There was something horrible in the arraignment, because of this impersonal delivery.

"You were the most avid thing I've ever known," Norma went on; "wanting everything, wanting it right away, wanting it regardless of what it was or whose it was. You seemed to have no moral sense."

She stopped, but it was clear that more was coming and Dorinda waited.

"I made allowances," the detached voice went on. "I told myself that it was the life you had led, that terrible home life you could never stop talking about. It was your excuse for all you did—for your egotism and your selfishness and your cruelty. I thought it was a good one. I loved you. I made every allow-

ance for you. I begged and prayed my father to let our friendship go on, because I wanted it to and because I was fool enough to think I could help you. When he refused, it almost broke my heart. It seemed as if I could n't give you up."

For a moment she sat silent, as if contemplating as an outsider that struggle of only two months back. But when Dorinda tried to speak she held up a thin hand.

"Be quiet," she ordered. "You started me, so let me finish. I made up my mind when I agreed to come that if you wanted the truth you should have it. But there is n't much to add. All I need to say is that when you got your claws into David Goddard, and started in to wreck his life, too, I realized what you were. I saw then that you were all that my father thought you."

"So that's it." Dorinda spoke very quietly, her eyes, like Norma's, on the burning logs. She wanted to raise them, to look at the other's face, but she could not.

"Yes, that's it. Is n't it enough?" Norma's level voice rose. "Is n't it enough?" she repeated; and now at last she wheeled to face her friend. "See what you have done to him already!"

The courage in Dorinda, never greatly shaken, even when, as now, she was sick at heart, rallied to her need. She forced her eyes to meet those strange and almost terrible eyes of Norma, with their new blank look.

They were not blank now. Something flashed out of them that made the other girl shrink back. But she spoke as quietly as before.

"It's generally admitted, you know," she reminded Norma, "that the accident was n't my fault."

"I'm not talking about that," Norma said, with a gesture that eliminated the accident from the discussion. "And I'm not talking about David's broken arm and broken ribs. I'm talking about his broken life. I'm talking about the indecent speed you grabbed him with, which did n't give either of you time to think. I'm talking about that hideous gang of yours, your Black Butterflies. Ugh! Every instinct in David must loathe those creatures; yet you plunged him among them, and you even let them follow you to the hospital where he lay. They must have made his life a hell those days. Oh, we heard about it here, and it turned the tide for David. Everybody seemed to feel that however weak and foolish he had been in letting himself marry you, his punishment was going to be too heavy and that they must all stand by. You don't know what those days must have meant to him, and you would n't care if you did. I do know, for I know David."

Dorinda had turned away, but at this their eyes met again. Norma hurried on, her voice growing stronger in her increasing excitement:

"Yes, I know David. I thought I knew you, but I don't, for I can't imagine why in God's name you



married him. I'm not fool enough to think you loved him, or that he loved you. Oh, no!" She laughed on two notes as harsh as a jay's cry. "If you had, there would have been an excuse for you. You did n't love him. You simply annexed him because you decided that in some way you could make him useful."

"I would never have annexed him, Norma, if I had dreamed that you loved him," Dorinda said in a low voice.

Norma sprang to her feet.

"How dare you?" she began, chokingly. "How dare you—"

Dorinda nodded.

"You do," she said, very gently, "and you know you do. Why do you deny it? Why should n't there be truth on both sides?"

As Norma made no answer to this, but stood staring at her, her back to the door to which she had instinctively retreated, Dorinda went on.

"Of course I did n't know. I can see now that I should have guessed. It's all so clear as I look back at it . . ."

There was another silence before Norma spoke.

"Oh, well, I suppose I've acted like a fool," she said in the detached, flat tones she had used in the beginning. "Think what you like. It does n't matter. Nothing matters. I don't know why I minded what you said. It's the sort of thing you would say."

She came back and dropped into her chair again,



crouching forward, elbows on knees and chin on hands, staring down on the rug at her feet. "I don't care about anything now," she went on. "I've been through too much. No one can help me, and no one can hurt me." She ended as she had begun: "It does n't matter. Nothing matters."

Dorinda was silent, mentally feeling about for the right thing to say and not finding it, and Norma went on, in the same indifferent tone.

"Just the same," she brought out, "if we had been let alone we could have cared . . . both of us. David was beginning to. He did n't realize it, but he was. And if he had," said Norma, suddenly straight and with lifted head, as if the words were a rallying call to dignity, "I could have cared, too. And he'd have had a beautiful life . . ." She broke off, and went on less quietly: "It is n't myself I'm thinking of; it's David. He would have been my father's successor and his son. He would have been a happy, successful man. Instead, what are you giving him? A home in a sort of madhouse, among a set of outcasts from decent society!"

"Say anything you please," Dorinda said, though the blood beat in her ears. "I suppose I deserve it. But don't think I don't know that David matters. He does . . . and I do know it."

It had taken Norma a long time to realize that a new Dorinda was speaking—a Dorinda different from the one she had known, different from the Dorinda who

had brought her into this room only fifteen minutes before. She was still unwilling to admit the knowledge.

"You're not going to pretend that you love him?" she contemptuously jerked out.

"There was no love in our marriage," Dorinda admitted. "And I've treated him abominably ever since. It has all been a horrible mistake. You and David should have married. It would have been exactly the right thing, in every way. I wrecked that chance. It's the lowest down thing I've ever done, but I didn't know I was doing it." She rose and came to her friend's side. "It is n't too late to straighten it out, Norma," she said steadily, meeting the other's eyes as they rose to hers. "You see, David and I are n't really married. It was just a form, just a business arrangement to give me control of my life and property."

She watched the wave of color flood Norma's thin face.

"I offered David a salary to do it," she went on. "No one else knows about this; but I'm telling you everything. I owe that to you. Mr. Hatch says David has n't taken any of the salary. I can see now that he never will; and from the first he has insisted on paying all his own expenses. The experiment has gone all wrong from the start. David told me before we left the hospital that we ought to get out of it, regardless of the scandal. He thinks the sooner it is

done the better. But I've begged for a month's truce. I meant to do better, and persuade him to go on with it, but that was before I knew you cared . . ."

Norma rose. She had regained her calmness and something of her old assurance.

"I don't know why you keep insisting that I love your husband, Dorinda," she said evenly. "I suppose I could have loved him under different conditions; but I'm the old-fashioned type that does n't let go till she's sure."

She told the lie gallantly, with shoulders back, and the hearer's heart contracted as she watched her.

"It is n't too late," Dorinda repeated. "We'll separate and get a divorce. It's the least I can do after the mess I've made. And in a year or so, when the talk is over, you and he—"

But at this Norma cried out.

"Don't!" she exclaimed. "For God's sake don't talk about David Goddard as if he were something on a Christmas-tree, to be handed down! Marriages can't be so easily dissolved, and I'm a Catholic, so I don't believe in divorce." Her face twisted almost grotesquely. She caught Dorinda's shoulders in her thin hands. "The thing for you to do is to make a success of your experiment. Do that and I'll forgive you, if I have anything to forgive. Now I'm going, and this is the last we shall see of each other for a long time. Don't write; I shall not. But forgive the things I've said."

"Forgive the things I've done," Dorinda begged, clinging to her with eyes wet.

They kissed, and Norma went to the door opening on the hall.

"Tell my father I'll meet him downstairs," she said as she crossed the threshold. And she added in a lower tone: "Say good-bye to David for me. I don't want to see him again."

## CHAPTER XVI

WHEN Judge Davis and Norma had left the house, Dorinda returned to her fire and to a bath in the black sea of remorse. She reflected that possibly she ought to go in to David, for Miss Allen had gone for a walk. But David was really all right now—able to move about and come to her if he chose, or if he wanted anything. She herself needed to be alone. The past half-hour had given her one of the worst shocks of her life. Following the stimulation of this shock, she had committed herself to a definite promise to Norma and to a course of action she still believed to be the right one. Norma had not accepted the promise; indeed, she had put it definitely to one side, intimating that she could never marry a divorced man. But that was merely a dignified gesture. David was not a married man and, though Dorinda knew little about such matters, she had realized from the first that both church and state would regard her marriage as no marriage at all. To give up David now meant the dropping of all her hopes, the readjustment of all her recent plans. At the mere thought of it her own life cried out, like a child she was forsaking.

Seated before her fire, feet on the fender and hands

clasped behind her bobbed head, in unconscious imitation of Goddard's pet pose, she reviewed her situation.

She had never intended for one moment to let her matrimonial project go to smash, and she had been appalled by the near prospect that it might do so. She had made a lot of blunders, due to her pride, to temperament, and to inexperience. She had entered upon the compact with the ignorance of her youth and with the arrogance born of six months of complete independence. She had attached vast importance to the possession of this independence, and she had been much more impressed than she had seemed by the philosophy of Janet Walker, whose "sober second thought" in refusing to pack her husband's trunk during her honeymoon David himself had commended.

Dorinda believed that this was the way to manage men, especially a man who was merely an employee. One must keep the upper hand. Her experience was limited, but the theory had worked with Chad and Jim and Jack Normand, and with other members of the Black Butterflies. She had thought it supremely important to keep the upper hand with David, and so it had been; but she had gone about doing it in the wrong way.

David was no Jim or Chad or Jack Normand. One could not whistle him to heel and keep him there as if he were another Freckles.

Having learned her lesson, she had been prepared to compromise. She would never yield her independ-

ence; to do that was unthinkable; but she would proceed along new lines. She would make a friend and partner of David. This, to do her justice, had been her purpose from the first, but she had taken fright at the early manifestations of independence on his part. She had not only taken fright, but she had lost first her temper and then her head. All in all, she had acted like an idiot, and she had been prepared to admit it to David as well as to herself. Her plan for reconstruction of her scheme when the month's truce was up, had been to make this frank confession, to promise David that there would be no more of the scenes and wabbling he despised, and to keep that promise. In the interval, of course, she would show him by her attitude of camaraderie and self-control that the partnership could go on successfully.

Norma's visit had changed all that. If she herself had not insisted on the visit, Norma would have sailed for Europe with her secret still safe, and when she came back a year later the three concerned in it would have so readjusted their lives that the secret would never have been revealed. But Dorinda had insisted and Norma had come and Norma had broken down—and here they were. There was no wisdom in looking back, Dorinda told herself. Her road lay straight before her. She would enter into David's plan, dissolve the partnership, secure the divorce, and let the community get over the scandal. David would be free and he could do what he chose with his life. It was no part



of her plan to betray Norma; nor would she do anything to bring the two together beyond giving him his freedom. Indeed, however greatly she might desire to play the goddess in their machine, she could not do so. She would be out of their lives for all time, equally powerless to help or to hurt them.

Out of their lives for all time, while they two, perhaps, lived their lives together. At the thought a pang went through her and her breath caught. David out of her life for all time! She tried to take in the thought, and the effort brought to her the full realization of her dependence on him. She could not visualize a future that did not hold him. Even in what he had called her "spasms," even when she had so childishly fussed and sputtered and verbally regretted, she had always assumed that he was there to stay.

Yet how she had treated him! Looking back over the past two months, she saw herself as she was, and with a distinctness that was staggering. She had snapped and whined and bullied; she had been unjust, tyrannical, and unreasonable. In short, it all brought her back to the starting-point she had already reached by subconscious realization of these things: she had been a fool. Now, she was to pay heavily for her folly. She was to miss the one big chance of her life. One didn't try such an experiment twice; and where, if one did, was there another David?

Her first impulse after Norma left had been to return to her "spasms" and "wabbling," as the best and

quickest way to untie the easy knot between them. But the sagacity and common sense in her, which were at such variance with the misconduct of the past two months, warned her against this. The details of their separation, as the public saw them, would be hectic and horrible enough. She owed it to David to give him such peace and comfort, mental and physical, as she could in their last weeks together, and to conduct their private lives and private parting with dignity. They would need all the strength and courage they could store up to carry them through that divorce. Then David's friends would rally around him—she was beginning to realize how many he had—and he would swing into the serene current of his former life. The Black Butterflies, of course, would rally 'round her, but the prospect did not hearten her. It was the first time she had thought of the Butterflies in connection with this readjustment. She must get what comfort she could from the thought of them, for henceforth the Butterflies would be all she had.

She was crying now, heavily, agonizingly, and so absorbed in her misery that she did not hear a tap at the door leading from the hall, nor the opening of the door itself. David entered, staring uncertainly at the small figure buried in the big chair. He hesitated, and then, hearing a gulp, impulsively came forward. She turned, staring up at him with wet eyes, and he looked back in consternation. He had seen a woman cry only once during his life, and that had been his

mother, weeping over the coffin of his baby sister when he was a child of four. The picture had always remained with him, adding a poignant touch to his natural masculine horror of feminine tears.

"Dorinda," he asked quickly, "what is it?"

"Oh, the blues—that's all." She drew a catching breath, sat up, and wiped her eyes with determination. "Norma's call was n't very cheerful, you know," she added, "and she looks so wretched."

"I thought so, too." David was relieved by the explanation. He went on soberly: "But Judge Davis says she'll be all right, and by the way he spoke I know he meant it. I was afraid of something like tuberculosis, but he says it's nothing organic—just a nervous breakdown that she's almost over. A year abroad will make her as good as new. May I stay?" he added cheerfully, swinging a chair forward and dropping into it without waiting for the permission.

Dorinda looked at him curiously. His unconsciousness was as perfect as that of a small boy. If he had ever felt a dawning interest in Norma,—and she now suspected that Norma was mistaken in thinking he had,—it was clear that he had not the faintest suspicion of Norma's interest in him. She was touched, too, by his coming to her in that simple and natural way, and by the other fact that he had gone out into the hall and entered from there, instead of casually strolling in through her bedroom as she knew Chad or Jim would have done under the same conditions. David's taste in

matters of conduct was always good. He rested his black head against the chair back and sighed.

"I 'm as restless as a cat," he confessed. "Somehow I can't adapt myself to sitting around. I'm going downstairs to-morrow, and of course I can get back to the office Monday. Thank the Lord it's my left arm that's out of commission and not my right," he added fervently.

"David," Dorinda asked abruptly, "have you ever been in love?"

He looked at her in surprise.

"I know you're not in love now," she went on, "because I asked you when we were talking about this plan of ours, and you said you were n't. But have you ever been?"

He shook his black head.

"Never, really," he confessed. "Of course I hoped I was, a few times. Naturally, I wanted to be. I suppose every man does. I'd admire a girl's hair or eyes, and get a little sentimental, but it never amounted to anything serious and it was always over in a few weeks."

"Did you 'rush' the girl when that happened?"

He laughed.

"No, I always waited to see if it was the genuine article. It's a wonder I didn't have an affair or two," he went on, comfortably crossing his legs and leaning forward to clasp his left ankle with the well-shaped right hand she had begun to watch. "They

were going on all around me at the university, which is co-ed, you know, and a lot of the fellows talked a good deal. . . . What kept me out of it, I suppose, is that I had neither time nor money. I worked like a dog about eighteen hours a day, and I had to stretch every penny to cover my expenses. That sort of thing does n't conduce to 'twosing,' you know. Have you ever been in love?"

He asked the question with a sudden straight look at her.

"Never—and I never shall be. I have a horror of love."

"That is n't right," he said, in wise solemnity. "The fact that we 've missed something big ourselves is no reason for slamming it."

"I suppose it is n't, but I 've no use for love, just the same." She decided to experiment a little. "Have n't you ever seen a girl you thought you 'd like to marry some day . . . a girl you knew pretty well . . . a girl like, well, say like Norma, for instance?"

"Norma!" The word came out in spontaneous and unflattering surprise. "Norma," he thoughtfully repeated; and quite obviously for the first time he gave his mind to Norma as a candidate for matrimony.

"Norma is a fine girl," he said at last. "She 's one of the best. But somehow I never even thought of sentiment in connection with her. I don't believe many would. She 's so practical and level-headed that she rather demolishes romance. She 's . . . I was going

to say she's above that sort of thing, but of course that's nonsense. No one is above love when it really comes; and when it's the right thing I suppose it's a question of getting up on one's toes to reach it and be worthy of it, and all that," he interpolated, rather self-consciously; and returned with obvious relief to Norma: "Of course Norma will marry some day. And now that I think of it, I can see just the sort of man she'll take—a quiet, steady, rather matter-of-fact fellow. She'll make him very comfortable and happy, but I rather think she'll care a whole lot more for her children than she will for him. Norma," he added complacently, pleased with his own insight, "is the strongly maternal type."

Dorinda experienced a pang of sympathy for Norma. Poor Norma!

"Would that kind of wife suit you?"

He grinned at her.

"What is this? Psychoanalysis?"

"No, merely an interesting conversation. But of course you need n't answer my questions if you don't want to."

"Oh, I don't mind. Only I'm not on very familiar ground, you see. Chad and Bryant can talk this kind of thing to you by the hour—"

"They have," she said briefly.

"I'll bet they have," he muttered with sudden distaste. "It's their favorite indoor sport." The thought of those conversations was extremely unpleasant to him.



"Well," he ended, philosophically, "I'll be mighty tame after them."

"Just the same, I'd like you to tell me your ideal of marriage and home life."

He laughed again, rather self-consciously.

"I don't know that I can," he admitted. "I've always taken it for granted I'd have them some day, but I have n't got down to picturing ideals."

"Suppose you do it now." As he hesitated, she added almost irritably, "Good Heavens! it's something to talk about, is n't it?"

"That's so," he acquiesced. He understood. She was feeling as restless as he felt. The nurse was out. Norma had gone, leaving her depressed; even Freckles had deserted her for an ecstatic run through the night with Johnnie. If it would amuse her to take the scalpel to him in lieu of a better subject, he'd indulge her whim; and since he had to talk he'd talk straight.

"I'm greedy," he coolly admitted. "When the time comes, I want the roses and the raptures and all the rest of it. I want to be mad about the girl and have her mad about me, but I don't want—and, so help me, I'll never have—one of the brainless type that has only one interest in life, and that her husband. I want my wife to have a lot of interests, all subordinate to me, of course," he added with his grin. "I want her to be a good hostess and enjoy entertaining our friends. I want her to be a darned good mother, willing to have three or four children—I'd like two boys and two



girls—and to give them a lot of time. I want her to be a good sport, the kind that instinctively plays the game and stands up under the shocks of life.” He saw the deep flush that combined so unbecomingly with the slight remaining congestion in her face, but he went on doggedly. She had asked for this. Now let her take it.

“I want her tolerant and understanding but with high ideals; willing to let others do pretty much what they choose, but with definite standards for her own conduct. I want her pretty, healthy, popular, and kind. I want all these things, but I know I’ll never get them,” he added gloomily; and ended with the smile that so warmed his face, “and if I do get them, the poor girl will spend her life wondering what the deuce she has got in exchange. Now you can describe your ideal,” he added kindly. “Turn about is fair play.”

She shrugged indifferent shoulders.

“I’ve told you I have n’t any ideal,” she said, “and that I have a horror of the whole business. But sometimes it amuses me to hear other people talk.”

“You’ll be pretty lonely when you grow old if you don’t marry,” he sagely pointed out.

“I’ve never felt that the society of an old man would console me then,” she said, forgetting the unique position in which they stood. Both, indeed, had quite forgotten it during this edifying discussion and now, remembering it, they looked at each other blankly. In the mind of each the same thought rose obtrusively. It

did n't matter, for the whole affair would be ended in a few weeks more.

The realization made for reflection, David's taking the form of a rehearsed interview with Hatch about the divorce and the best way to get it. It was going to be a nasty mess, any way one looked at it; a choice of applying for annulment at the end of the truce, on the ground that they had never lived together, or of placing David in the position of deserting a bride of six weeks. The former course meant giving to the public all the details of their agreement—nice stuff for the newspapers! He winced at the thought. He'd have to let Hatch decide what must be done. The prospect of giving all the facts to Hatch was acutely unpleasant.

Miss Allen breezed in and was gratified by the pleasure her reappearance gave her two patients.

"And now you must both go to your beds," she announced after the reception was over. "It's almost ten o'clock and you should have started half an hour ago. So say good night prettily, Mr. Goddard, and trot along."

David said it, and trotted. He was glad to go. But the problem of the grounds for the divorce accompanied him to his pillow and sat there while he continued to consider it. Without doubt Hatch would decide that he, David, must be the victim. A straight divorce on the ground of desertion and without any confession that the marriage was merely a form, would probably be best for the girl; that is, it would be best for almost

any other girl. But would it be best for Dorinda? Considering their respective reputations, would n't it give her an additional black eye? Would n't scandal-mongers whisper that the town's model young man had discovered something about his bride's past or present. . . . He turned restlessly, twisted his injured side, and groaned. Hatch would have to decide. And, thank Heaven, Hatch, and not he himself, would have to give Dorinda some idea of the kind of questions she would have to answer, the sort of suspicions that would be aroused.

What an odd creature she was! Talk about women that keep a man guessing! She could give a man a new guess every week till Doomsday. He did n't know yet how to make her out. He knew only that in certain moods she was rather wonderful. Those moods, for instance, in which she slipped her hand into his, or stood with her hands pressed against his chest, looking up at him. Merely habit, of course. He had seen her do those things with Jim and Chad. Still, they were mighty taking.

By breakfast-time things had brightened again. To their surprise both had slept well when they really settled down to it; and a remark Dorinda made as she poured the coffee started a new and agreeable entente.

"I should think you'd get horribly tired of being shut up with me and looking at this discolored face," she said rather abruptly.

"I never see it," he told her.

She looked at him uncertainly.

"You mean," she interpreted, "that you 're thinking of something else."

"No," he said simply. "I mean that I see you as you were before the accident. I think I've noticed the congestion only twice, and that was when I first saw it in the hospital. I suppose I've got used to it. Anyway, I think of you and see you, when I look at you, just as you were before the accident."

"You ought to be a courtier, David," she said, "or, at the very least, First Secretary in some highly civilized European Embassy. I will make the only return I can," she added. "I will give up my hideous purpose of pouring your coffee first and then putting the cream in it. You shall have things in their proper order—two lumps of sugar," she dropped them in, "hot milk," she added that, "and last of all the coffee." She poured it in and handed him the cup. "There," she said as he took it, "this is a Big Moment in our lives."

He took it with a flush of pleasure. When she was like that she was adorable. The harmony between them was not disturbed even when she absent-mindedly put three lumps of sugar into his second cup and added the coffee before the milk. It was a crumple in the rose-leaf, but one could not always have perfection.

"I've written to New York for a lot of flowers to be sent to Norma's state-room," she remembered to mention, "and I sent the florist a card with both our names on it."

David nodded. The incident helped to bring him back to earth. He 'd have to find out what those flowers cost and pay Dorinda for half of them. He was not going to accept credit for her gifts.

Dorinda stood with her back to him, looking out at the window. It had snowed again during the night, quite heavily, and the white expanse that stretched before her was deep and almost unbroken.

"I really can't understand why Kitty and the rest don't show up," she mused aloud. "Even if your theory is right, they 'd hardly stay away so long. This is Friday morning, and I have n't had a glimpse of them or even a telephone message since we got home Monday afternoon."

Annie, who was putting the breakfast dishes on a tray, preparatory to carrying them to the dumb-waiter, raised a respectful voice:

"Excuse me, miss . . . ma'am, I mean . . . but I think Miss Perkins and the two young gentlemen has left town."

Dorinda wheeled from the window.

"Left town? You don't mean for good?"

"Oh, no, miss . . . ma'am . . . only for a few days."

"Who said that?"

"I don't know, ma'am." (Annie always got it right the third time.) "Some one told Kate no one has seen them around."

Dorinda turned back to the window without com-

ment. It was quite on the cards that the Black Butterflies should take a sudden flight, assuming they could raise the price of such diversion. She herself had joined several of their expeditions, and others had taken place without her. Usually, not always, the Butterflies let her know they were departing. Complete independence of movement was as much their creed as it was hers. Perhaps, after all, her marriage was to make some difference in her relations with them. They would not have left her alone, still a semi-invalid, if she had not had David to look after her. She felt lonely and restless. She increasingly missed Kitty's music, and Kitty herself. Now that Norma was gone forever, Kitty was all she had left. And just when she most wanted and needed Kitty, Kitty had inconsiderately disappeared. Dorinda felt injured.

"There's an old sleigh out in the barn," she said, "and a horse that I have n't had the heart to sell, though he's eating his venerable head off. Besides, we use him for garden work in the spring and summer. Suppose we go out for a sleigh-ride this afternoon?"

"Jove! I'd like that!" David agreed. But Miss Allen mentioned that Doctor Warren must be consulted.

"He'd better show up this morning if he wants to be consulted," Dorinda said flippantly, "for we'll start right after lunch. He can't possibly object," she pointed out, as Miss Allen remained silent. "We'll put on fur coats.—Father had several that will fit you," she assured David.



"Mr. Goddard ought not to drive," Miss Allen pointed out.

"Of course he should n't. I'll drive, myself," Dorinda announced, and emphasized the sudden silence of the other two by coldly adding, "even if it does n't seem a very good plan to either of you."

Warren, who blew in about eleven o'clock, had a better idea.

"What's the use of resurrecting that one-horse shay?" he demanded. "I'll take you myself, in my new two-seater, behind a pair of horses that can't be beaten, if I do say it. I'm always tickled to death when the snow comes to stay and I can use them."

"But you have n't the time," Dorinda objected.

He gave her a depressed glance.

"Have n't I? Time's the one thing I ain't got nothin' else but, as the darkies say. There's hardly a case of sickness in this confounded town. I'd probably be starving now if it were n't for you two. It cheers me up a lot when I think of the bill I'm going to send you," he complacently added. "I'll probably add the ride to it, if I feel straitened."

David enjoyed that ride with the healthy zest of an active man out in the air and sunshine after three days of sick-rooms. He admired Warren's horses even to Warren's content, talked more than usual, and was conscious of steadily rising spirits. Though he and Dorinda were in the back seat and Warren and the nurse sat in front, he talked principally to the doctor; and, un-



consciously to both men, the foundations of a lifelong friendship between them were laid that afternoon. Dorinda said little and her spirits, not high when she started, sank as those of her companions mounted. Afterward she told herself that she had felt a premonition.

Warren's time seemed as much his own as he had boasted. It was after five o'clock when he drove them through the wide entrance gate into the Maxwell grounds and up to the house. The house welcomed them with smiling eyes, but before they could descend from the sleigh Annie threw open the front door as if she had been waiting for their coming. She wore an air of haste and urgency, mingled with importance, as she hurried out on the veranda.

"Oh, miss . . . ma'am!" she began; but before she could go on, Chad Bailey slipped past her from the hall and, coatless and bareheaded, shot down the steps to the side of the sleigh. Ghastly of face, babblingly incoherent at first when he tried to speak, he conveyed the same impression to each of the arrivals. The fellow was drunk. The next moment they saw that he was merely distraught.

"Don't get out!" he shouted, as they threw back the robes; "don't get out, I say! Why in hell were you gone so long? I've been rushing back and forth for two hours. Here, let me get in, will you? Hurry!"

David reached out and caught Chad's gesticulating arm.

"Steady, old man," he said before the others could speak. "Tell us what it's all about."

"I'm telling you, you ass," Chad yelled. "It's Kitty. She's dying. For God's sake, start! Let's get to her. There is n't a minute to lose, and you four have been gadding through the whole universe."

He hurled himself into the sleigh and Warren wheeled the horses.

"Is Miss Perkins in her own quarters?" he asked.

"Yes . . . *yes!*"

Chad's teeth were chattering, but not with the cold. David pressed him back into the seat between Dorinda and himself and drew the heavy robe over all three, but Chad still shook and shivered as the horses raced down the driveway, bits of packed snow and ice flying from under their newly shod feet.

"What's the matter with Miss Perkins?" Warren called over his shoulder.

"She's dying, I tell you. God! I thought you'd never come—and I didn't know what else to do! Hurry!"

"Is any one with her?"

"Yes, Jim. But he's no good. She's suffering horribly." Chad's teeth rattled again. "I was no good, either," he brought out in a gasp.

In front of the flour-and-feed store the doctor pulled up and turned to David.

"Think you can stay in the sleigh and hold the horses? If I'm here too long," Warren added with

an affectionate glance at his beloved team, "drive the others back and have Johnny look after the horses till I get there."

"All right." David changed seats and took the reins. The doctor and nurse, with Dorinda and Chad, hurried through the store, empty save for its thin and narrow-faced proprietor, who looked at them oddly and suspended his labors with some bags of flour to watch them as they climbed the broken stairs to Kitty's studio. They heard moans as they crowded into the long, bare loft, where Chad, a little calmer now, started to lead the way. Warren pushed him to one side and swung forward, also ignoring Jim as he came toward them from the shadows of the room. For a moment the doctor leaned above the writhing form in the bed. Then he came to them with swift strides.

"Here, you, all of you, clear out!" he ordered, and there was nothing in his voice or manner to suggest the debonair owner of the black pair. "Clear out quick—all but Miss Allen. Miss Allen, you come here!"

## CHAPTER XVII

**A**T the foot of the sagging staircase Dorinda, who was in the lead, stopped and looked back.

"Where 's Jim?" she asked.

"Up there," Chad gulped. "He won't leave. He belongs."

"Wait!" She grasped his arm as he tried to slip past her. "You've got to answer some questions. How long has Kitty been ill?"

"Three days."

"Chad! Why did n't you come for me, or telephone?"

"She would n't let me. She made Jim and me swear we would n't ask help from any one except an old woman, who was there two days. Kitty 's as proud as the devil, you know."

Chad spoke with his back against the dirty wall of the building, his manner that of one with his back against the wall of life. "It's been plain hell." He jerked out his story in disconnected phrases. "Not much food, or fire . . . and Jim gave the old woman all the money he had. It was n't that sort of thing we minded; we've gone without things often enough.

We had plenty of milk, and milk was all Kitty could take, anyhow. But she was in such torture . . . and she went frantic when we begged her to let us get a doctor. She kept insisting she 'd be all right in a day or two. . . . We hoped she would . . . did n't know much about such things, you see. I stayed . . . could n't do anything, but I felt I had to stand by . . . but to-day I broke away and went for you. Could n't bear it any longer . . . had to . . . Say, I can't talk about it. Let me get out of this. . . ."

Dorinda kept her arm in his and drew him forward through the store, convinced that she was having a bad dream.

"Where are your hat and coat?"

"I don't know. Upstairs, I suppose."

"Go back and get them. It's horribly cold."

But Chad shuddered away from this.

"Can't go up there again . . . could n't stand it."

"Then come home with me and we'll fix you up. I'm coming right back with some supplies—"

"No, I'll stay around here. Won't go upstairs . . . but must stand by, you know."

"Dear boy, don't be an idiot. You can't do a thing. Come home and have a hot meal, and then you can come back." Dorinda was in tears, but she rushed him along as she wept. Back of his one counter the narrow-faced proprietor of the store lounged easily, following their progress with steady eyes. He had reached a tranquillity of age which no emotional assault could

disturb; but he had always vaguely wondered what was going on in that loft upstairs, had always known something would happen, and now here it was. Unfortunately, he did not know exactly what it was. The Butterflies were as tight-lipped as they were black.

"Get warm and eat, with Kitty and Jim going through *that*? What do you think I am?" Chad asked the question with weary distaste, but almost inaudibly. It was plain that he was on the verge of complete exhaustion.

"Kitty never told me she was ill . . . and she looked so well while she was with us at the hospital," Dorinda brought out.

"She did n't tell any one. She did n't even tell Jim till we were on the train, coming home. Was it only last Monday? It seems centuries ago," Chad gibbered.

When they reached the sidewalk he jerked his arm out of hers.

"I'm off. I'll see you later," he stammered, and disappeared in the shadows. Dorinda hesitated, looking after him. But she must get those supplies without a moment's delay. She hurled herself into the front seat with a suddenness that startled the waiting horses.

"Let them out," she urged David. "Every minute counts."

"What is it?"

"I don't know; that is, I hope I don't. But it's all terrible."

He asked no more questions, but gave himself to the

task of keeping the flying horses in the road. Dorinda tentatively touched his heavy coat sleeve. He seemed the one steady object in a reeling world, but this was no time to cling to him. She could only rest on the sense of strength and comfort his presence gave her. At the entrance of the house she faced him, wet-eyed but herself again.

"Hold the horses till I get Johnny," she directed. "Then you must go into the house. I've got to go back with some supplies and I'll take Johnny with me."

"You'll take me with you, if you're going back," he ruled.

"It is n't worth arguing over," she said, but he could see that she was relieved. "Doctor Warren won't let any one stay. But they need provisions and stimulants and hot-water bottles and bedding and fuel . . ."

She was up the porch steps as she spoke, still verbally adding to her list, more in mental preparation than as information to him. David jumped out of the sleigh and awkwardly hitched the horses to a tree.

"I'll find Johnny and we'll get the wood and kindling ready," he called after her, adding a winged comment under his breath as his injured arm and his ribs reminded him that they did not take kindly to swift movements. The other arm worked for two, and in half an hour he and Dorinda were back at the flour-and-feed store with the laden sleigh and with Johnny added to the party to help in carrying packages upstairs.



When the supplies were assembled near the top of the staircase, Dorinda tapped timidly at the studio door, and after what seemed a long delay Warren opened it with a reluctance communicated by the grimness of his expression. This softened as he took in the character of the relief expedition.

"I thought you might have sense enough to do something of this sort," he remarked. "Meantime I've sent Miss Allen out for some essentials. You can't come in, but I'll send Bryant here to take in the stuff, and then he can make a fire. Get home to bed now, you two," he told David and Dorinda, and they realized that for the time they were no longer friends or even patients, but merely encumbrances in the path of a busy man.

"Doctor," Dorinda ventured, "is she really in danger?"

"She's a mighty sick woman. I've sent for Howland and Weston, and I expect them any minute."

Dorinda was both alarmed and relieved. Next to Warren himself, Howland was Grandon's best physician, and Weston was its leading surgeon. Evidently conditions were very serious, but it was equally clear that the physician in charge was fully meeting his responsibilities.

"Please see that everything is done, and have the bills sent to me," Dorinda directed. "You will need nurses—probably two of them."

Warren nodded.

"I ordered one for to-night," he confessed, "so Miss

Allen could get back on her job. I thought you would stand for that."

"Of course. Anything . . . everything."

"The stuff you have brought will help, too." As if feeling that they had earned a little more information he gave it to them in a lower tone.

"Here's something you can't beat for irony," he told them. "Those two—" he jerked his head backward toward the studio—"Bryant and Miss Perkins, were married eighteen months ago. They kept the marriage a secret because they thought every one would laugh at them for going back on their principles and preachings! Now they've lost their baby and killed the mother, I'm afraid, by trying to keep the birth secret, too. Afraid of the ridicule of the Black Butterflies! Is n't it enough to make the gods roar?" He tried to speak with his usual lightness, but his voice was not quite natural. "Things are pretty bad in there," he added in explanation, as he left them.

The visitors waited before the closed door, but when it reopened both stared uncertainly at the figure confronting them. It seemed incredible that this unkempt, red-eyed, trowsled creature, drugged by exhaustion, who obviously had not taken off his clothes for days and who stood looking at them as if he did not know them, could be the dapper Bryant. But the red eyes fell on the accumulation on the stairs, and as if it reminded him of something he had been told to do Jim bent auto-

matically and began to fumble among the packages. David checked the vague gestures.

"Stand still, old man, and we 'll fill your arms," he suggested. "Then you can go in and empty them, and come out for more."

Bryant straightened as automatically as he had bent, but while they were filling his arms his strained, haggard face creased and wrinkled like that of a baby about to start a paroxysm of crying. When the last packages had been stacked up in his arms, he stood waiting for a moment as if trying to remember something he had to say, his tragic eyes unseeingly on the visitors.

"Thanks," he got out at last, and stumbled away from them across the threshold.

David shivered.

"The look of those two fellows makes one realize something of what they've been through," he said slowly. "But why was n't either of them man enough to get out and get more help for that girl, even if she did n't want it?"

"Kitty always ruled them both," Dorinda said drearily. "They did n't realize it, but she did it; and neither of them has the common sense of a baby. Evidently she kept telling them she would be all right the next day and they believed her. . . . Chad's racing about somewhere right now, without a hat or overcoat."

"They 'll come 'round to normal as soon as they see

that everything is being done for her," David predicted. "Chad will drift back to learn how things are going and then he'll be warmed and fed. There's food for a dozen in that hamper."

Dorinda drew a quivering breath.

"I hope I'll wake up," she admitted.

"It's a good deal of a nightmare, when one realizes what must have been going on in there."

David took the reins from a reluctant Johnny and motioned the boy into the back seat.

"You'll have the fun of feeding and bedding the horses," he told Johnny, "for I have an idea they will be our guests for the night." Dorinda agreed. The coming consultation, and the presence of the surgeon bore out that theory.

They had dinner in her sitting-room, and after it they both sat staring into the fire, seeing the same pictures: the bleak studio, the little group of physicians and nurses, Jim's tortured, distorted face. Dorinda's thoughts stopped there. She could not get past those pictures, and the flashing glimpse of that writhing, moaning figure on the bed. Goddard's thoughts went further. He was taking in the incredible fact that the Black Butterflies had endured all this rather than ask for help, though, through the grotesquely inverted reasoning back of so many of their actions, Jim had been ready to borrow help, and even to steal help. If he, David, had been able to respond more generously to

Jim's plea for a loan, much suffering, mental and physical, might have been avoided. He could not blame himself, for how could he have known, and what could he have done if he had known? Clearest of all, he held the memory of Bryant's agonized face. Wonderful to be able to love like that—almost worth the horror of such an experience. Yet it was Bryant who had the capacity, Bryant the pagan, the scoffer, the idler, Bryant with his everlasting talk of "sex." No wonder he talked of it, with a love like that in his life. And there was the faun, that wild, gay creature of nature, enduring in his way almost as much as Bryant suffered.

He asked a question of his silent companion:

"Did you know that Bryant and Miss Perkins were in love?"

Dorinda came back to the question as one returning from a long mental journey.

"I suspected that Jim cared," she said in a low voice. "And that Chad loved her, too. But I knew that she did n't care for Chad that way, and I was n't sure she cared for Jim."

David drew a deep breath.

"I've got to tell you something," he began, and described the incident of Jim's last visit. "I gave him all I had," he ended. "But it was only a few dollars. It could n't have done much except buy milk and partly pay the old woman. Of course, if I had known, I'd have raised money somehow—"

"Of course. Poor Jim! Poor, poor Kitty!"

She spoke so quietly that he wondered if she had taken in the full meaning of the recital. She stood up.

"I'm going to bed," she announced.

He rose, and for a moment she faced him, looking up into his eyes. Then, as once before, she caught his coat lapels in both hands, in an intimate, almost desperate gesture.

"From the day we met," she brought out fiercely, "I've plunged you from one trouble into another, without stopping. I should think you'd hate me!"

"I don't," he said quietly, realizing the overwrought condition she was in, "and you know I don't." His impulse was to put a hand over those nervous ones on his breast, but he held himself in and smiled down at her. "I wish I could help you," he added.

"You have. You do. But I have an idea," she ended on a quick breath, "that I shall need a lot more of your help in the next few days."

"If you do, you will get it. Good night. Try to sleep."

He held the door open for her and watched her as she passed through. Then he closed the door, and with a sigh that was almost a groan dropped into his chair, rested his black head against its high back, and shut his eyes. The modulations of her voice seemed to echo in the room. Almost he could see her passing through that door, looking up at him. He could hear her now, moving around in the adjoining room. . . .

And she thought he hated her!

He uttered a sound that was meant to be the sardonic laugh of a man tricked by life. But it was n't. It was merely the choked sob of a frightened boy, equally afraid, in that moment, of life and of love and of himself.



## CHAPTER XVIII

“**Y**OU can see her for a few moments,” Warren told Dorinda when she reached the studio the next afternoon. “It’s pretty near the end, but she’s fairly comfortable now. Don’t let her talk much.”

He motioned to the day nurse and both went to a dim front window of the loft, where in low tones they discussed the patient’s chart. Jim, crouching on the floor at the foot of the bed with his head buried in his arms, they ignored as if he had not been there. He did not move as Dorinda approached and she forgot him as she bent over Kitty—if this wraith in the bed could be Kitty! For a moment her mind rejected the knowledge that it was. But the voice, though merely a husky whisper, was Kitty’s throaty contralto.

“Oh, Dorinda, you’re here. I’m so glad!”

“Kitty, Kitty! *Why* did n’t you let me know? I shall never get over that!”

Tears were pouring down Dorinda’s cheeks, though she had earnestly assured Warren that she would be quite calm.

“I wanted to, really; but I could n’t. I did so hope to keep everything quiet. Silly, was n’t it?”

Kitty spoke almost drowsily, but she held Dorinda’s hand in a grasp that had no weakness in it.

"I can't talk just yet," she went on in the same drugged tones. "Can't think quite straight. Things get away from me. Sit close and let me hold your hand. Then perhaps I'll remember what I want to say. . . ." As her friend drew a rickety chair to the bedside and obeyed, Kitty's grasp tightened.

"You . . . don't . . . think every one will . . . laugh . . . at . . . us, do . . . you, Dorry?" she asked in a voice so suddenly clear that it was plain she had put all her ebbing strength into it.

"No, Kitty! no, *no!*" Dorinda said, and pressed the clinging hand in both her own.

"I'm glad," Kitty sighed, and added in her husky whisper: "Just the same, it was a terrible mistake—the way we did it. I've made blunders all my life, but this was my last and biggest one."

At the foot of the bed Jim dug his head in the bed-clothing as if he could bear no more, and Kitty, perhaps feeling the movement, looked at him with a sudden light in her glazing eyes.

"It was n't Jim's fault," she continued in the throaty voice that was the only recognizable thing about her. "No one must ever blame Jim. He wanted . . . he would have done anything. He begged me . . . But you know how I've been, always. Stubborn . . . horribly. I would n't listen. I . . . could n't. I was afraid every one would laugh at us if we were found out. We've preached so much, jeered so much at others. But it was n't merely the fear of ridicule.

My feeling went deeper than that. We had betrayed our convictions, Jim and I, and that's the one unpardonable sin," said poor Kitty. "Right or wrong, one's got to live up to what one believes. We did n't . . . we did n't . . ."

"But, Kitty darling, you *did*!"

For the first time in her life Dorinda Maxwell was reaching toward a higher power, begging that power to give her the right words. "Until the test came you lived up to what you thought were your convictions. When the test came, when you fell in love, you realized what your convictions really were, and you lived up to them. You married. It's all so clear. Don't you see?"

"Perhaps . . . I don't know . . . I hope so . . . I'm awfully confused. Anyway, I've got to pay the piper. I've got to leave Jim . . . and my music . . . and this beautiful world . . ."

"You must not give up like that! The doctors have n't—"

"Don't talk," Kitty said drowsily. "I want to think. I must try to remember what I wanted to say. . . ."

There was a long silence. Kitty lay with closed eyes, and the visitor, forcing herself at last to be as calm as she had promised to be, looked at the unfamiliar mask on the pillow. It was unbelievable that one could change so much in so short a time. Again she had the sensation, so familiar of late, of living

through a bad dream. She looked around the loft, its atmosphere transformed to something like comfort today, by her efforts and those of the doctor and nurses. The wild confusion and clutter she had observed during the moment's visit of the night before had given place to order. There was a fire in the Franklin stove. The bed was immaculate. The place held a suggestion of drugs and sickness, but the January air entering through the windows open at the top was cool and fresh. As if the patient followed the other's thoughts, she spoke suddenly.

"I have n't thanked you for all you're doing."

"Don't, Kitty!"

"You've always been a trump," Kitty muttered, "but I suppose there's a big chance that you'll make a mess of your life, like the rest of us. And yet . . . I ought not to complain. I've been awfully happy . . . till now. Do you hear that, darling?" Her voice had risen, as if again she must be sure of making herself heard. "Ever since I've known Jim and loved him I've been perfectly happy. Do you hear, Jim?"

"Yes, dear." Bryant dragged himself along the floor till he was within touch of the groping hand Kitty had released from Dorinda's.

"I want you to remember that," Kitty said, still drowsily. "I want you to remember that . . . always. Our ideas were wrong, so we wasted our lives. I suppose that's why we have to pay. But we were happy,

just the same. I was always happy till the Black Butterflies came.—Jim!”—her voice rose in sudden panic—“don’t let them come, will you?”

“My darling, don’t begin that again. It’s all nonsense and we’ve told you so.” Jim spoke quickly, almost sternly. He had straightened, had obviously pulled himself together, as if to meet a crisis. He turned to Dorinda and spoke with something of his natural voice and manner.

“There was a paper shade on the lamp on Kitty’s piano,” he said, speaking very distinctly, “in the form of a black butterfly. And there were a lot of other black-paper butterflies that Kitty had hung around the studio as decorations. You remember them, don’t you?”

“Perfectly,” Dorinda said quickly, realizing that for some reason the assurance was important.

“Well, when Kitty was first taken sick it was at night,” Bryant went on in the same clear tones. “The lights have always made reflections on the butterfly decorations, here in the studio, and they always threw a big black shadow of the lamp-shade butterfly on this opposite wall, right here, facing Kitty. She used to look for that shadow and like it. She knows all this as well as I do. We have talked about it again and again—have n’t we, Kitty?”

“Yes,” Kitty said obediently. “Yes, Jim.” Her voice shook. “But I can’t be really sure of it unless you tell me.” She turned her dimming eyes to Do-

rinda. "That 's why Jim has to stay here every minute, so he can tell me often. I . . . get . . . so . . . terribly . . . frightened!" Again her voice rose, but Dorinda saw that Warren and the day nurse, though they had turned their heads to watch their patient, did not move. Evidently it was Bryant's scene, and now, distraught though he was from grief, exhaustion, and lack of sleep, he was rising to it gallantly.

"You wouldn't believe Kitty was such a foolish girl," he went on, almost buoyantly, "but that first night, owing to her fever, she actually got it into her head that those black butterflies were live things, flying around here and bothering her."

"They got into my eyes," Kitty interrupted on a thin wail, "and into my ears, and they brushed their horrible, sticky wings against my face.—Jim!" Her voice rose to a shriek.

"Hush, darling, there aren't any butterflies here." He went on with his robust explanation: "Of course the first time Kitty spoke of it, that first night, I took down all the butterflies and burned them. So there has never been a butterfly, real or artificial, in the place since then. But Kitty's fever made her think she still saw them; you see, she had got the idea pretty firmly fixed in her imagination. So she keeps it up, though she knows jolly well, in her level little head, that it's all a foolish figment of her sickness. Don't you, darling?"

"Yes, dearest. I'm not going to be afraid of them

any more," Kitty sighed obediently. "I don't feel them now. Try to take a nap till they come again. I mean," she hastily added as he shook his head at her, "till I *think* they have come again."

Dorinda's throat contracted. So this, as well as his grief and anxiety, was the explanation of Jim's almost unbroken vigil—a vigil now in its fifth day.

"They're all gone," Kitty murmured peacefully. "Go to sleep, Jim. Hold my hand tight, Dorry. After . . . they're . . . gone . . . I . . . can . . . always . . . see . . . that . . . it's . . . silly . . . but when they come again . . ."

Jim returned to his post at the foot of the bed. If he left her even for a few moments, Dorinda afterward learned, and if the black butterflies came in his absence, as they were almost sure to do if Kitty missed him, she had an attack which the nurse could only compare to delirium tremens.

"It's an awful thing to see her go through," the day nurse put it, her lips tightening under the memory. "But now Mr. Bryant can almost always stop the attacks at the beginning. That's a blessing, for otherwise she'd soon wear herself out and we'd have to give her frightful doses . . . How that young man endures it is more than I can understand," she went on. "I've never seen anything like his devotion and his physical endurance. It seems he did n't eat or sleep for the first forty-eight hours. . . . And then the other complications, too!" She paused and sighed.



"Of course the doctor wanted to get her to a hospital last night. But she was determined she would n't go, and we were all afraid she would die on the way if we risked it. Your friend is a very determined person. If Mr. Bryant does n't have a complete breakdown after it's all over, I miss my guess," she darkly ended.

That confidence came later in the afternoon. Just now Kitty was again turning her dim eyes on her friend's face.

"Dorry," she asked suddenly, "do you believe in a heaven?"

"Yes, dear."

"What do you think it will be like?"

"I think yours will have a great deal of music in it," Dorinda said brokenly.

"That would be wonderful." Kitty closed her eyes. "I've been without music . . . How long is it I've been without music?"

"About five days. Would you like to have some one come and play for you? I could easily arrange it—this evening if you wish."

Dorinda made the suggestion so eagerly that Kitty smiled her wide-lipped tolerant smile.

"No, thank you, dear. You could n't find any one who could give me the sort of music I'm used to," she said, dispassionately stating a fact whose truth both recognized. "Is Jim asleep?"

"I think so. He's breathing very deeply."

"I'm glad. He thinks it's more comfortable that

way than in a chair. I don't know why. It would n't seem so."

The tone was so natural, the atmosphere now so normal, that Dorinda told herself they were all mistaken. This was no death-bed. As the reflection crossed her mind, Kitty's face puckered childishly.

"I know I'm awfully selfish to keep him here, but he would n't leave me even if I tried to make him. And he'll have all the rest of his life to rest . . . in this beautiful world . . . while I am . . . where shall I be?" Without waiting for an answer to the question, she asked another, "It is a beautiful world, is n't it, Dorry?"

"Yes, dear."

"I've always loved it." Her voice was dreamy again. "And after I found Jim it was perfect till all this came . . . and those horrible butterflies . . . crawling and sticking—*Jim!*"

She began to shake again, and Dorinda had to wake Jim. He came back as if from another world, half blind, stupid with sleep. But one look at the shivering figure in the bed acted like an electric current, bringing him bolt upright.

"Why, darling," he began, cajolingly, "that nonsense again! Don't you remember . . ."

This time the quieting was a longer process, and in the midst of it Dorinda slipped away, at a sign from Warren. As she was leaving, Kitty, who for many

minutes had seemed unconscious of her presence, stopped her.

"Come . . . again . . . Dorinda . . . when . . . these terrible . . . things . . . are gone. There's something . . . I want to . . . say."

It was the next afternoon before Dorinda got that final message. Then it was gasped out on broken breaths, by a Kitty who looked even less like Kitty than the one of the day before.

"Don't stay more than five minutes," Warren directed when Dorinda came in answer to a telephoned summons. "Yesterday I'd have staked almost anything she would n't last till this morning. Her vitality is amazing. What I'm worried about is Bryant, but he'll stick it out if it kills him, too."

Plainly Bryant was sticking it out, but at last he had made some concessions to Warren's notions. He was seated in a cushioned chair close to the top of Kitty's bed, and holding her hand, which rested under his own on the chair's padded arm.

"She's pretty comfortable," he croaked hoarsely, when Kitty herself did not reply to Dorinda's inquiry. He had caught a heavy cold, for which Warren was dosing him at intervals.

Kitty opened her eyes and smiled at her friend.

"I . . . know . . . what I . . . wanted . . . to say,

Dorry," she began, without preface. "I . . . could n't . . . remember when . . . you . . . first came . . . in. I . . . knew I'd . . . remember . . . if you . . . waited." She was plainly confusing the visit of yesterday with that of to-day, but she put her message clearly.

"It . . . is n't . . . worth while. That's what . . . I wanted . . . to tell . . . you, Dorry. We were . . . happy, but . . . we wasted . . . our lives. That . . . was a . . . sin. I wasted . . . my music. That was . . . a sin. That's why . . . we're paying . . . this way. The wages . . . of sin . . . is death. That used . . . to frighten . . . me when I . . . was a little . . . girl. I heard . . . it . . . in church . . . and . . . every time . . . I was naughty . . . I expected . . . to die. I'd have . . . died a . . . good many times." Her lips drew back in an approach to Kitty's tolerant smile. "Well, I'm . . . doing it . . . now. Don't you see?" she went on eagerly. "Want . . . you to see. Don't want you . . . to make . . . the same . . . mistakes. I have n't . . . time to . . . change. You . . . have. See what . . . I mean?" said Kitty, who loathed colloquial expressions, because they were unbeautiful.

"Yes, dear."

Kitty's voice went on as mechanically as a metronome marking time.

"We could . . . have saved . . . our baby . . . if I had n't . . . done . . . so many . . . silly things. Silly dances . . . on the table . . . so . . . many

. . . silly . . . things . . . We could . . . have lived happily . . . ever . . . after . . . and beautifully . . . and safely. You . . . see, Dorry?"

"Yes, dear."

"Our way . . . was n't . . . right, so it . . . brought the butterflies . . . the black . . . butterflies—*Jim!*"

Dorinda buried her face in her hands. She heard Jim's voice, raised huskily but distinctly :

"Why, Kitty darling . . . don't you remember . . . nothing of the sort here now . . ."

When she was leaving, Dorinda slipped a thick envelop into Jim's hand.

"David sent this to you," she said. "He got a check cashed yesterday, because he knew you would want to settle the accounts yourself."

Bryant nodded. He knew she was lying, but it did n't matter. Nothing but Kitty mattered now.

"She'll be quiet for half an hour or so," he told Dorinda. His own mind was clearer to-day, under the effects of food and other stimulants. The nurse was feeding him as if he were on a six-day bicycle race. "She's quieter this afternoon. She has long periods when she lies with her eyes shut and mutters words that don't mean anything. Then her mind comes back for a few moments, almost perfectly clear, as it did with you just now; but she soon drifts off again."

Kitty's beautiful fingers, the fingers that had given Dorinda such music as she was never to hear henceforth, picked restlessly at the bedclothes. At this time

a week ago—was it possible?—Kitty had been playing for her at the hospital. Kitty babbled incoherently.

"She may lie in this condition another twenty-four hours," Warren muttered, coming to the bedside and looking at her.

She did not. When David and Dorinda came again at six, to get a later bulletin, Dorinda glanced at the upper windows as they entered the flour-and-feed store and her heart dropped. The shades were drawn down. . . . It must have happened very recently or she would have been notified. Kitty had no telephone, but surely some one would have slipped downstairs to telephone from there.

She passed through the store with dragging feet, David following her in silence, but before they had reached the stairs a figure stumbled toward them. It was hatted and overcoated and ready for the street, but it moved almost blindly, feeling its way. She caught its arm.

"Jim!"

He looked at her, then nodded.

"It's over," he croaked, and, bewildered, started toward the staircase again. Then, as if suspecting that this was not what he should do, he blinked at her uncertainly. "Warren told me to go to bed, but I don't believe I know just where the bed is," he stammered.

"Come home with us," Dorinda said, as David caught Jim's arm and steadied him. "We'll see that you get to bed, old boy."

Final services for Kitty could come later. Just now their duty was to find for this blind and groping figure that had so steadfastly followed its beloved to the gates of death, a path that would lead it back to life and sanity.



## CHAPTER XIX

**I**N the big guest-room of the Maxwell house Jim Bryant slept the clock around, with the new master of the place slipping in and out at intervals the next day to make sure that all was well with him. On their arrival, the evening before, David had ministered to him like a woman—had supervised his bath, had made him eat, had finally tucked him between the sheets and covered him up and turned out the lights, to leave him to the sleep which descended on the exhausted visitor even as his host finally closed the bedroom door and left him. Once or twice the incongruity of this service to one he had so disliked and disapproved of touched the surface of Goddard's mind, but it did not linger. Whatever Bryant had done,—and there was no question that his record was black,—he had gone through his individual Gethsemane like a man. David's thoughts dropped the matter at that.

Jim came down to dinner the next night, bathed, shaved, and informally dressed in his choice of Goddard's wardrobe, that absently included a cheerful red tie above which his white face loomed tragically. For a few moments he made a desperate effort to act naturally; but when he realized that his host and hostess

had no idea of asking him questions, did not expect him to talk, and were quietly discussing matters as remote as possible from the episodes of the past six days, he sank into the haven of silence he so plainly desired and ate his dinner in an abstraction that quite evidently banished all thought of where he was and what he did.

Chad was the fourth of the party, from which Miss Allen tactfully absented herself, to eat her dinner upstairs. Chad looked almost himself again, except for a pasty pallor and a twitching nervousness that found expression in the smoking of cigarettes as fast as he could finish one and light another. Neither he nor Jim drank anything but water, though the whisky decanter stood at Bryant's elbow and for once Annie ignored its presence there. Left to himself, Chad would probably have accepted its mute invitation; but apparently Jim did not realize that the decanter was on the table and Chad loyally followed his chum's lead, while he also took upon himself Jim's share in the quiet dinner talk.

After the meal, alone with Jim in a corner of the library, Dorinda gave him the details of the day's arrangements.

"We did everything as we thought you and Kitty would wish it," she explained. "We have left Kitty in her own studio to-day, because we felt sure she would want it that way."

Bryant moved and wet his dry lips.

"Alone?" he asked huskily.

"No. I persuaded Miss Mason, one of the nurses, to stay till everything is over. It's very cold there, of course. But she has coats and rugs and plenty of books, and she can read and rest."

Jim rose.

"I'll go over there now," he muttered.

"But you will come back in an hour or two, and get another good night's sleep."

"No, I'll stay there. You say the funeral will be to-morrow. I want to be with her as long as I can."

Chad, when he heard the decision, went quietly into the hall with his friend and put on his overcoat and hat; and the two pagans, whose every instinct throughout their misspent lives had been to avoid pain and sorrow and physical and mental discomfort of every sort, went slowly back to the icy studio, through a snow-storm which had begun that morning and was steadily growing heavier.

For a moment the Goddards stood in the open doorway, watching the bent figures as they plodded through the drifts. Then David closed the door, and taking his companion by the arm led her back to the library and the welcoming chairs before the fire. On the floor in front of Dorinda's chair Freckles thumped an ecstatic tail. Everything had been very hectic lately, but now these loved creatures on whom his destiny depended seemed to be settling down to an atmosphere which a self-respecting puppy could approve. Still,

after the past two weeks, one could never tell what they would do next. Freckles so arranged himself that he could watch them both and be prepared for anything, while his amber eyes turned from one face to the other.

"It's all simply terrible," Dorinda said in a low voice. "No one needs to tell me that."

"No one has any idea of telling you that," David assured her.

"I know you would n't, but the rest will. I can hear Mr. Hatch now, and even Doctor Warren, though he has been so kind. Misspent lives and their inevitable result! The wages of sin is death. Poor Kitty's childish terror as a text. That will be their note, and there is n't a house in Grandon to-night that is n't full of I-told-you-sos. The first thing Kitty did when I got there was to ask if I thought people would laugh at her."

"What did you say?"

"Can you ask? I said they would n't. But I knew, and she knew, they would make her their horrible example."

"Of course. I merely wondered how you put it, and whether there had been any extended talk. You have n't had time to tell me about it, you know."

If he could keep her talking, he decided, it would be easier for her.

"Not that first time. Kitty kept trying to remember something she wanted to tell me, a warning from her

own fate, poor darling. She remembered it yesterday, not long before she died. The misspent life was her text, too. She thought she was dying because of it, and perhaps she was. In their hearts she and Jim were conventional, though they did n't know it. They made a false start and had n't the strength to change. Even when they made the brave concession of marrying, they concealed their marriage as if it had been a crime. They convinced themselves they had to live up to what they had preached, instead of up to what they really believed. It's all awfully hard to understand," she sighed. "But I suppose there's a big lesson to be learned from it."

"I think what it meant," David said gently, "is that Miss Perkins and Bryant, and probably Bailey, too, never believed, even in the beginning, in the creed they tried to live up to. They were afraid of life, all three of them, and they whooped and turned handsprings to keep up their courage, as kids whistle in the dark. They tried desperately to be wicked, and sometimes they succeeded; but down under it all they were incurably decent."

It was probably the best epitaph that could be offered to the Black Butterflies, and Dorinda inscribed it on the mental monument she was erecting to their memory.

"That's true, I think," she agreed. "And Kitty herself understood it, at the last. It's odd she did n't see it sooner. I'm trying to think that out. So often people don't seem to realize that they've done wrong,

until they have to 'pay the piper.' But they always have to pay, don't they?"

"I suppose so, in one way or another." David was conscious that he was getting beyond his depth. "Anyway, that's the generally accepted theory. If death does n't collect from us, life is very apt to."

As he spoke a trick of memory brought Bryant before him in one of Jim's argumentative moods. Two weeks ago Bryant would have loved to dive into such a discussion and drag his associates under water with him! Bryant never realized that he was beyond his depth, so perhaps he never had been.

Dorinda bent forward and gathered Freckles into her lap, where the puppy settled contentedly, his apprehensions almost at rest. She stroked him softly as she went on, finding a dim comfort in the nearness of the devoted creature.

"Does n't it surprise you," she asked suddenly, "that a girl as plain as Kitty could win and hold two men so utterly and so long?"

David nodded.

"It was her music, of course. No one could resist her music. She could have done anything with me, any time, after she played; and you know she hypnotized everybody in the hospital."

"And I'll never hear her music again," Dorinda wailed. "Oh, David, I'm so hideously lonely!"

She broke down, her tears falling on the puppy's white head, and Freckles sniffed and stirred uneasily,

wondering what the humans were up to now. David rose and stood beside her chair, looking down at her. Her tears were torture to him, and his helplessness was worse than her tears.

"Don't!" he begged. "I can't bear to see you cry."

In that moment he felt that he could die to comfort her.

"Would n't it help a little if you could make a friend of me?" he suggested. "You know, that was the original idea."

Dorinda wiped her eyes with an almost vicious dab of her handkerchief.

"The one unselfish act of my life," she brought out, "will be to let you have your freedom as fast as you can get it. And I'm going to do it. See what I've dragged you into already."

"I disliked Bryant very much," David said conversationally. He dropped back into his chair, vastly relieved by the drying of her tears, and ignoring her words. "And I confess I despised Bailey," he went on. "Miss Perkins I admired because of her genius. As I've said, she could have done anything with me while I was under the spell of her playing, though I always got over it soon after she stopped. But in these few days," he ended soberly, "I've learned a lot about them all. I see now why you loved them, and why they had such a strong hold on you that you were almost ready to wreck your life rather than give them up. They did n't know much about life, but they were past



masters at love and friendship. And love and friendship are such enormously important factors that one can forgive the Butterflies for ignoring most of the others."

"Oh, David, I think you do understand them! I was sure you would!"

To his horror she was crying again, but she put out a hand to him which he caught and held. It was an icy little hand and almost before he got the thrill of its contact he sprang up contritely.

"You're freezing here," he said, "and I have n't had sense enough to feed the fire or get you a wrap."

He bustled about, putting fresh logs on the andirons and bringing from the hall a fur coat he insisted that she must put on. Then he hurried into the dining-room for a decanter of sherry, and begged her to drink some of it. As she obeyed, her teeth chattered against the rim of the glass.

"I believe you've got a chill," he suggested, watching her anxiously. "Being in that cold studio all day has been too much for you."

"No, I'm all right,—but it's rather nice to be waited on again."

The remark made him thoughtful. He remembered that Chad and Jim, whose manners were as correct as their morals were lax, had kept up a fairly steady fetching and carrying for the girls, and an adjusting of pillows and moving of chairs that at the time usually struck him as overdone. They had left him little if

anything to do, and possibly he had neglected some of the courtesies he should have shown Dorinda. He hoped not, but it was something to think about.

The bell rang and Annie's light step along the hall was followed by the sound of the opening front door, other footsteps, and the reappearance of Chad, who immediately fixed an avid eye on the decanter.

"Jim kicked me out," was his brief explanation. "He's sent the nurse away, too, till morning. Wants to be alone with her this last night. Goddard, give me a glass of that, will you?"

He drank the sherry without a pause, drew a third chair close to the fire, and huddled there, dispiritedly monologuing. Jim, it appeared, was going to cut stakes and go away the day after the funeral, as soon as he had settled his bills. Some friend had sent him money. Chad cocked an eye at David.

"And by the way, Dorry," he interrupted himself to explain, "Jim wants you to have Kitty's piano. It's the only thing she had that was worth giving away, poor girl, but it's really a good one—much better than the one you have. So perhaps you can find room for it. He'll tell you about it himself if he thinks of it again. Anyway, he wants you to send for it the day after to-morrow. He's going to give up the key to the studio that afternoon."

Returning to Jim's more personal plans, Chad expressed the conviction that he meant to tramp a bit.

"He wants to be out in the open, away from every-

thing and everybody," he elaborated, "and that's his idea of the way to do it, though I must say it would n't be mine. After that he'll settle down somewhere and go to work. Kitty made him promise he would—said she'd be watching him. She will, too. Catch Kitty letting Jim drift on alone! I offered to go with him on the tramp, of course, but he turned me down. I would n't be any good at that sort of thing—too soft. Jim has the constitution of an ox. If he had n't he could n't have gone through—" Chad stopped and helped himself to a second glass of sherry.

"I'm off, too," he then confessed, as he lit another cigarette. "Aunt Julia's got me in tow, and I've committed myself to a six-months trip to Europe with her. We're sailing next week. Don't know how it will work out, but the old girl was mighty decent when I blew in on her, and she struck while the iron was sizzling, for she saw I'd be glad enough to get away from here. I told her the whole story, and I know she'd have seen Kitty through if you two had n't been doing everything."

David liked the sound of that "you two," undeserved though it was.

"So that's the end of the Black Butterflies," Dorinda murmured, her eyes on the fire.

"That's the end, and pretty near time, if you ask me," Chad muttered. "The club was on its last legs, anyhow. Kitty had lost most of her interest in it, and aside from ourselves there had n't been a dozen at the

meetings for a year. They were the limit, too—slackers like Normand and his pals. I've hardly seen them since Dorry's party, almost two months ago," Chad ended virtuously, and David grinned over the unconscious smugness of his tone.

"I see you as a future pillar of society, old man," he prophesied. "Devoted squire of Aunt Julia, and man of affairs."

But Chad was not yet in a mood for pleasantries.

"I'm going to have a try at it," he said soberly. "I promised Kitty I would. Kitty was bound she'd make men of us both, from her grave. Odd, was n't it," he sighed, "how she changed at the last? But I suppose most of us do, if we're given time. If I had n't made that promise, Aunt Julia would n't have found me so easy. The old girl is going to help me a lot. The only trouble will be to keep away from this kind of stuff." He waved an affectionate hand toward the sherry. "I'm on an allowance now and I've reached the end of it. So take away the decanter, Goddard, like a good chap."

David took it away, with a passing touch on the other's shoulder. Chad threw his cigarette into the fire, and crouching forward, stared at the burning logs.

"There's no taste in tobacco any more," he complained. "There's no taste in anything. I don't want to whine, but when it comes over me that I'll never see Kit again . . . that I'll never hear her play, that she's going to be buried to-morrow—Oh, God!"

He swung around toward them. "Tell me, you two," he groaned, "how does a man get through these things?"

They could n't tell him, and he looked away from them, winking hard.

"Here, give me that dog," he cried desperately, and snatched the puppy from Dorinda's lap.

Freckles, who had been asleep, awoke with a protesting yelp. But finding a familiar face close to his he yawned forgivingly, and then did his duty as he saw it, by licking two big tears off the faun's thin cheeks.

## CHAPTER XX

KITTY'S death had been a tragedy, but her simple and movingly beautiful funeral took much of the grimness from the memory of it. The studio had become an ivied arbor, with a bank of flowers on which Kitty lay asleep. The old minister who read the service had the look of a pilgrim poised for entrance to a better world. And the fresh young voices that sang three of Kitty's favorite hymns—who but Jim would have known that Kitty *had* favorite hymns?—could not have been criticized even by Kitty herself, so tolerant of all things save bad music.

One of the hymns was "Where He Leads Me I Will Follow," and Dorinda's heart contracted under the memory of the night Kitty had sung it to her when she returned to the waiting Butterflies after her first jaunt with David. The ironic twists of life made her soul cry out. . . . She had been surprised at the time that Kitty knew the words. . . . There was "The Christian's Good-night," too—another hymn Kitty had occasionally sung, always with a little effect of exaggerating it, but never really doing so. . . .

Kitty had once told Jim, Chad mentioned, that her mother had loved these hymns and that she herself,

when a baby, had often been sung to sleep by them. Kitty and hymns . . . Kitty and prayers . . . Kitty and "the resurrection and the life." . . . Strange, indeed . . . but not as strange as this new, cold, still Kitty asleep among the flowers, this Kitty whose hectic life career had so abruptly given place to the final career of death.

The foreground of the picture held the group that had surrounded Kitty in her last days—Jim, Chad, Dorinda, David, Doctor Warren, the two nurses. A little back of these, among the green shadows, out of place and unhappily conscious of it, the last of the Black Butterflies restlessly clustered together—Normand and a dozen of his pals, counting the minutes till the service was over. Still farther in the rear, modestly near the door, Dorinda saw the proprietor of the flour-and-feed store, up in this forbidden territory at last, to see for himself what was going on. His narrow face held a quiet and wistful look. He was as unfamiliar with hymns as the Black Butterflies near him, but, unlike the Butterflies, he liked the sound of them. He had a strange impression of being far from home. Surely this was not his loft over the flour-and-feed store. . . .

And then they all made the journey to the cemetery, through a white and strangely silent world, in which snow was still falling, to leave Kitty in a deep green-lined bed on a hilltop, under a mountain ash, from one of whose branches a huddled sparrow watched the pro-



ceedings with bright eyes. The Black Butterflies, still a little on the outskirts of the group but loyally standing by their president to the end, exchanged glances as the first clods fell, mingled with the voice of the old minister in the words of committal. Kitty's burial had been beautiful enough to satisfy even Kitty; but the Black Butterflies were being buried with her, and they knew it.

Warren insisted on driving the Goddards home after the services at the grave, though both begged to be allowed to walk.

"You two seem to forget that you're still semi-invalids," he remarked as he grasped the reins and watched David help his wife into the big sleigh.

"I wish Jim and Chad would come home with us," Dorinda said for the dozenth time, leaning out in an anxious effort to catch the eyes of the two young men who were exchanging hand-shakes with their old crowd. "I've begged them to, but they won't."

As if the words were a call, or perhaps because the two saw a chance to get away from the other group, Bailey and Bryant hurried up to her.

"I suppose this is good-by, Dorry," Jim said, holding himself very straight and bringing out the words in a strong voice. "I'm off to-morrow, you know, and I have all sorts of things to do to-night. Chad told you about the piano, did n't he?"

"Yes. I will send for it early to-morrow morning. I shall love having it, Jim. I'll keep it always; and

I'll give my piano, in memory of Kitty, to some clever music student who needs one."

"You know what I'd like to say. . . . I'll write. . . . Good-by," Jim added desperately; and, with a gesture intended as final farewell to them all, he plunged away through the snowdrifts, followed by the faithful faun.

"Can't we ride a little? This is so peaceful." Dorinda looked out over a stretch of white carpet and laden evergreens that ended in a vista of massed silver-gray clouds.

"I'll drive you for half an hour if you'll promise to go to bed as soon as you get home. I don't like this cold you've got."

"I'll go," Dorinda sighed. "I feel now that I want to go to bed and turn my face to the wall and stay there forever."

"Of course you do. You're all in. You weren't up to this experience at all. Spending the whole day yesterday in that icy loft and working like the dickens in the bargain was the craziest thing I ever heard of. If I'd known about it I'd have stopped it. Why didn't you stop it?" Warren irritably demanded of David.

David smiled. It was the first time he had done so for days, and Dorinda experienced a vague sense of relief over the return of something she had missed.

"Have you ever tried to stop my wife in anything she was doing?" he asked Warren.

"She looks as if she had a temperature this minute," Warren discontentedly muttered, glancing over his shoulder; but David assured him it was only a guilty blush. The younger man had decided that the atmosphere of gloom surrounding Dorinda had lasted long enough. He was inwardly relieved by the refusal of Chad and Jim to come to the house that night, though he would have done all he could for the poor chaps if they had yielded to Dorinda's pleas. But, like Warren, he was worried about her. She was as hoarse as a croupy child, and even to his untrained eyes she seemed flushed and feverish. Warren shortened the drive and took the situation in hand the moment they reached home.

"Where 's Miss Allen?" he loudly demanded, mounting the hall staircase two steps at a time; and even as the nurse responded to the call, orders for a hot bath, mustard plaster, bed, and perfect quiet echoed through the house. Warren had points of resemblance to Doctor Parker, though it would have pained him deeply to be told of them. In half an hour he joined David in the library and with a relaxed expression dropped into a big chair.

"I have time for a drink and a cigar, if urged," he remarked; but when his host had supplied these comforts he abruptly reverted to his professional manner.

"She 'll be all right," he began at once, "but it 's just as I thought. Her temperature is over a hundred and one. I suppose I ought to have brought her home im-

mediately after the funeral, but her nervous state is worse than her cold, so I thought I'd put a little poultice on that."

"You don't mean—" David began.

"No, I don't," snapped Warren, who objected to being interrupted when he was tired and discussing a case. "I'm telling you she's got a bad cold and a temperature and a high-strung nervous system that has had a big jolt, and I don't mean anything more than I'm saying. It's quite enough. We've got a nurse on the spot, and we'll nip this in the beginning. We won't take any chances."

"For God's sake, don't!"

Warren laughed.

"Thus speaks the bridegroom!" he jeered. "But don't you worry. She's as strong as a young colt, and I think the next few days will see her around again. All this is mighty hard on you, Goddard," he added with real sympathy. "The accident first and then the new work on the arm, with Miss Perkins's death on top of it all to knock your wife out again—and the whole combination striking you at the one time in life when a man expects to be his happiest. It would give some men an awful grouch. I hope you won't mind my saying I think you've gone through it very well."

"Thanks," said David, briefly. His response might have been taken from the little English book Kitty so often quoted—that containing phrases which end conversations. Warren shot a quick look at him. Evi-

dently the subject was not one Goddard cared to pursue. Probably he was feeling the whole business more deeply than he would admit. Warren did not know it, but he had missed a good dinner by his injudicious compliment. It had been David's purpose to ask him to remain, but now the young man had a panicky fear of what Warren might say next. He mixed another drink for the doctor, helped him on with his overcoat, and waved him out into the snow-storm without compunction. Warren, he knew, had excellent bachelor quarters and a good Japanese cook. As the doctor was taking the reins from Johnny's hands, he remembered something:

"I won't come back to-night unless Miss Allen telephones me, but I'll be here right after breakfast. I'd rather you did n't see Mrs. Goddard again, either, unless she asks for you. I've given her a sedative that I think will send her off, and a long night's sleep will do more for her than anything else. . . . No pain in the arm to-day, was there?" he added as an afterthought.

"Nothing to speak of. I suppose all this snow makes it a little uneasy."

"I'll look at it in the morning. Good night."

"Good night."

David watched the blacks trot down the driveway, and sighed as he went upstairs to his rooms. He was facing a long and lonely evening, but this was not the worst of it. Evidently his own nerves were on edge, as well they might be. He was in the grip of an

anxiety about Dorinda that amounted to a panic. His imagination, never torpid, was working overtime on possibilities of disaster—pneumonia, death. He wished now that he had kept Warren to dinner. Warren was interested in other fields than medicine and could have been firmly led into them, and he usually talked well when he got started. David checked a childish impulse to telephone Warren and drag him back. No, he had lost Warren for that night, and he must dine at his lonely table with the specter of his anxiety seated opposite him. Annie, deeply moved by the drama of recent events, might take it upon herself to cheer him by a few bits of local gossip as she came and went, but this prospect held no lure. She would talk about the Butterflies.

When the Butterflies had made their frequent calls Annie had always appeared to be unable to distinguish them from book-agents, but she now referred to them as a world-wanderer mentions the loved circle waiting at home. It was beginning to look as if Annie would never get over the bereavement of Miss Perkins's death, and David had no wish to hear her pangs described anew. He would dress. Everything had been very much upset for days, but now that life was moving on again he owed it to Dorinda to keep up the social standards at the Maxwell house. He gloomily fitted studs into a shirt, and made the usual annoying discovery that it was not a soothing task for a nervous and one-handed man.



While he was breathing a few low comments on his lack of speed a light knock sounded on the connecting door. His heart leaped, then pounded furiously. She had asked for him! He paused for no reflection on the phenomena of his own emotions but went quickly to the door and opened it. The immaculate Miss Allen, looking as snowy as the outer world, stood on the threshold, her brow puckered.

"Doctor Warren wanted Mrs. Goddard to be perfectly quiet to-night," she began in the low voice suited to the sick-room, "but—no, no, there's nothing wrong," she hastened to explain as she saw his quick change of expression. "Only she's very restless, and she insists that she is lonesome. Anyway, she can't get to sleep. So she wants you to eat your dinner in her room, if you don't mind. It can be sent up on the dumb-waiter, you know, and I'll serve it."

"That will be simply great!" David's heart leaped again and his smile flashed out. "If you're sure it won't hurt her."

"No; I suppose it would hurt her more if she did n't have her own way," Miss Allen dryly commented. "But she has promised to follow the rules. No talking. You can tell her you're glad to be there, and that's all. Then you must eat your dinner in complete silence; but I suppose it will be a comfort to her to feel that you are in the room," the nurse ended, relaxing under his evident pleasure.



"How soon may I come?"

"Mercy, don't rush me!" Miss Allen laughed. "As soon as dinner is ready. That will be—" she looked at her wrist-watch—"twenty minutes more. Now I'll run downstairs and explain to Annie."

David finished his toilet with the rush Miss Allen deplored. To be lifted from the loneliness of a formal dinner downstairs to this! His heart sang. The fire whispered its congratulations and the studs of his shirt slid into place as if they had been made for that great moment. He whistled under his breath while he dressed as formally as if he were going to the opera. He was ready and waiting when the next tap came.

"Dinner is served," Miss Allen reported, with a smile, "but I warn you that my service will be very casual. I'm no butler-maid like Annie."

David wondered how a mind could concern itself with trivial details at such a moment. He hurried into Dorinda's room and up to the bedside, remembering even in his elation a few things he had learned during his recent siege. He took her hand.

"Awfully good of you to let me come," he told her with soft radiance, and finding no other words for the big occasion he added earnestly, "I was getting ready for a stiff attack of the pip!"

She smiled.

"How nice you look! It's almost a shame to waste you on me. But there's still a lack. Hand me one of

the roses in that bowl on the mantel—a nice little fat rose. Bring a pin, too, from the cushion on the dressing-case.”

He selected the nice little fat rose without difficulty. There was one in the bowl that fitted the description as if it had bloomed for the occasion. Evidently it was to be one of those evenings when everything was right. Even the pin met its cue by standing stiffly erect where he could not miss it. He carried rose and pin to Dorinda, through the softly lighted room, and she raised herself a trifle to put the flower in his buttonhole. He bent over her, so close that her fluffy bobbed hair touched his chin, and his breath caught. She dropped back on her pillow, looking upon her work with satisfaction.

“Now you’re perfect,” she complacently announced. “Go and sit where I can see you and watch your table manners. And if you let the rose fall into the soup I’ll never forgive you.”

After that, silence and dinner, and the quick, efficient movements of Miss Allen, who mentioned that her service was really good if he didn’t mind admitting it, and the crackle of the fire in the next room, and the voice of the rising wind outside—and Dorinda’s eyes watching him. Not for a moment could he forget those eyes. Not for a moment did he want to. But they gave him an amazing sensation; made him a trifle dizzy. . . .

He hurried into the security of mild commonplaces

with Miss Allen, who, however, frowned on the effort. It became clear that the rule of a silent dinner was to hold—a silent dinner through which memories mingled with the tumult of his emotions and he seemed to hear again the strains of Kitty's music after his first meal at Dorinda's table. He did not dare to look at Dorinda more than once or twice, but those swift glances kept her before him as steadily as he was before her. She lay on her side with the bedclothes drawn up to her chest, the rolling collar of a Chinese bed-jacket falling away from her throat, and her arms, in wide mandarin sleeves of peacock blue and gold, resting quietly on the silk spread. He would have thought her asleep but for the gray-green eyes that watched him so steadily. At the end of the meal he could not have recalled a single dish he had eaten. The dinner might have been nectar and ambrosia and nightingales' tongues, but probably it was merely squabs and a good salad and his favorite dessert. He had a vague remembrance of something familiar about it, but that was all.

He repudiated the suggestion of a smoke in his sitting-room, with such passionate emphasis that Miss Allen laughed again.

"I can smoke as much as I like later on," he then explained more sedately. "But I want to stay here as long as I can."

Miss Allen admitted that the aspiration was natural.

"Just the same," she predicted, "you'll have to go in a few minutes. Mrs. Goddard promised to let you

leave right after dinner and she must keep her word."

"I know," the patient admitted, "but can't we speak alone first? There's something I want to say to my husband."

Again David's heart indulged in the queer little eccentric jump it had made so often in the last few days. But when Miss Allen had reluctantly left them alone with a final injunction she vainly tried to make stern, Dorinda's manner changed.

"Bring your chair here," she directed in her old tone of command. And when he had obeyed she added in the same tone, "Put it close and sit down."

He sat down, very close, thrilled but wondering, and as he waited she spoke in a voice that was like a frightened child's.

"David," she cried brokenly, "I'm afraid!"

He bent quickly and took her hand.

"Afraid? Why, of what?"

"Of life . . . of death . . . of everything. That's right, hold my hand. You don't think I'm going to die, do you?"

"I should say not! That's the wildest notion I've ever listened to. Why, you've only got a little cold."

His tolerant, cajoling voice steadied her as nothing else could have done. She spoke quickly and apologetically:

"I know. Ordinarily I don't suppose I'd have thought of it. But to come straight from the funeral of a friend you loved and to have a doctor and nurse

fussing over you and taking your temperature and starting a fever chart, makes one nervous. See—she has the chart over on the table. So I know I'm feverish, and I'm beginning to think I've got pneumonia. And my mind is full of Kitty and of what she went through and of those black butterflies she thought she saw—you don't know how terrible that was, David!—till I feel as if I could shriek. I thought if I got you in here I wouldn't be so frightened; you're so cool and steady; and I have n't been while you stayed. But if you leave I know I'll die of the horrors. I'm ashamed to be such a fool, but I can't help it. What can we do? Could you leave the door ajar, so that you'll hear me and come in if I go off my head?"

"Of course I could. But we can improve on that. I simply won't go. I'll tuck myself under this reading-lamp and read. I'd like nothing better."

"That would be wonderful, and abominably selfish of me. But if you could read here, for a couple of hours . . ."

"I'll read all night. I need to. I've got a lot to make up. Now I'll slip out and explain it to Miss Allen."

"I'm afraid she won't let you."

"She'll let me, all right," David informed her, with a sudden setting of the jaw. "She's a mighty good nurse, and she'll see the importance of keeping you steady."

"All right . . . b-but . . . can't you talk to her in here?"

He looked at her and his expression sobered. This was worse than he had thought. Her temperature was mounting, too. He was sure of that. On a quick impulse he drew his chair nearer the head of the bed, put his hand over her restless one, and held it strongly.

"There need n't be much talk," he said soothingly. "She 'll understand. Now I 'm going to sit right here, all night, and you 're going to sleep. Will you try?"

"Oh, yes!" The relief in her voice made his eyes smart. "Perhaps I can sleep if you 'll stand by. But I don't want to be a selfish beast. As soon as I drop off you can slip away."

"There won't be any slipping away," he assured her. "I want you to know that I 'm on this job for the night. Any time you wake up I 'll be right here. That 's understood, is n't it? So shut your eyes and try to sleep."

He adjusted his own position to one of greater comfort as he spoke and settled down with his head and shoulders braced against the chair's high back.

"I think I can sleep now," Dorinda closed her eyes and spoke almost dreamily. "I 'm almost sure I can."

"I know you can. Good night."

Miss Allen found them that way when she entered a moment later, and nodded comprehendingly over Goddard's brief explanation.



"It's all right if you feel up to it," she agreed, and the vigil began.

The first hours were the hardest, for Dorinda could not sleep despite her sudden optimism. She tried to keep her eyes closed and when she opened them it was to the reassuring vision of her steadfast guard, evidently very comfortable, relaxed, and thoughtful. A second sedative at midnight finally sent her off, and after that he, too, dozed for an hour, though always alert when the nurse came to the bedside or when Dorinda stirred. But the remainder of the night his mind was busy and he thought of many things.

His emotions were calm, his brain was cool again. He understood the little supper and why Dorinda had called on him and why he was guarding her now. Almost any other friend near at hand could have done as well. Probably either Jim or Chad would have done better. The girl was passing through a nightmare of grief and shock and fear and exhaustion and loneliness—surely a combination to shake the strongest soul. It was up to him to keep steady and not to deceive himself. He knew just where he stood—her sentinel, on guard against the outbreak of her inner panic. No wonder the memory of Kitty's obsession frightened her. He had heard that described by Chad, and he knew what Jim had gone through. Like their original arrangement, this vigil was a business matter. It was part of his job. It had not seemed like that during the little dinner, but it was.



If he had been idiot enough to fall in love, as he had, —with set jaws he admitted that now, at last, the real thing had come to him, and that Dorinda dwelt in the secret grove of his heart,—he could only accept this crowning irony and make the best of it. How was it Miss Maxwell had put it in making her bargain? “I’ll hate and despise you. . . . I’ll consider it a dishonorable breaking of an honorable contract!”

Well, she would never despise him, for she would never know. But the realization accomplished something at least. It cleared beyond all question the matter of their future. He was neither a Galahad nor a Freckles. He could not stay here. He and Dorinda would have that final show-down just as soon as the month was up and then he would get out and see what sort of patchwork quilt he could make of his life.

The dawn was gazing in at him with snow-filled eyes when he reached this decision.

## CHAPTER XXI

**D**ORINDA'S recovery was not so prompt as Warren had hoped, but it was at least clear from the first that nothing was seriously wrong. He diagnosed the case as one of acute bronchitis and nerve-exhaustion, and urged his patient to make haste slowly, cheerfully adding that he needed the money represented by the additional calls.

Dorinda remained in bed a fortnight, gaining physically every day but revealing a continued mental depression which disturbed the physician more than he would admit.

"What the dickens is she worrying about?" he irritably asked Goddard, during the third week, when Dorinda was able to move around her sitting-room but was still forbidden to go downstairs.

David reminded him that the patient's shock and grief over her friend's death could hardly be expected to wear off while the memory of it was so fresh, and Warren accepted the theory, without comment. But he was not satisfied. Toward the end of the convalescence he spoke of a little trip somewhere as a final cure, and before David had betrayed his inner horror over this project Dorinda herself vetoed it. She had

traveled enough, she said. To David she gave another reason.

"I know you're anxious to have everything settled as soon as possible," she brought out one evening when the two were together in her sitting-room. He had fallen into the habit of dining with her there; but this was almost their sole association, as he left for the office directly after breakfast every morning and did not return till five o'clock. There had been no more night vigils. Her nervous condition was steadier and she was sleeping better.

Though he could not confide it to Warren, he knew the cause of her depression. The same cause lay on his own mind and heart like a substance, and he spent many of the night hours going over and over the horror of the prospect before them. Dorinda was facing a scandal and publicity which scorched her soul even in anticipation. He faced those and the loss of her as well. Already the memory of the night when he watched beside her till dawn, her hand in his, seemed like a dream. Daily he could see her receding from him, like a fade-out on the silver screen.

"I'm anxious, myself, to have the wretched business over," she now went on. "You've been a perfect angel, and I'm going to make the only return I can by letting you off."

Her manner was that of a maiden aunt, or, at least, that of an elder sister, and David's very soul turned sick.

"I don't think we ought to discuss the matter yet," he pointed out. "You 're not up to it."

"No, not quite, and we 're not going to discuss it. I merely wanted you to know we 'll go at it the first possible minute. I think we can start it next week. In the meantime, had n't you better have a talk with Mr. Hatch and put the whole thing before him? He may want to think it over a few days before he advises us. It's a job that will take some thinking about," she ended grimly.

He nodded. The sooner the better for him. He was desperately anxious now to have the episode over.

"Of course you 're right," he agreed. "I 'll have a preliminary pow-wow with Hatch and give him the bald facts. Then I think we ought to have him come here to dinner, say Friday or Saturday evening, where we can both talk to him and he to us."

"That will be best," she acquiesced.

"He can think things over on Sunday and perhaps come again on Monday night. Hatch can do more thinking in one day, if he puts his mind to it, than most men could do in a week," said the new and ardent disciple of Hatch.

She gave him a strange look.

"You 're anxious to get away, are n't you?" she asked.

He hesitated.

"I think we feel alike about that," he said at last. "Since the beastly job has to be put through, the right

thing is to rush at it and do it. The sooner we start, the sooner we 'll finish. And, of course, when we have started," he ended, for this was as good a time as any to make the point, "I will move back to Mrs. Kemp's. After that it won't be necessary for us to meet."

"Do whatever you think is right," she wearily agreed. "I'm sure you will find the best way."

David did not share her confidence, but two days later chance gave him a forward push. Kimball, described to Dorinda by him as the one hard-working member of the firm, had long been weary of his position as draft-horse. In a moment of natural irritation he said as much to Hatch; in fact, he pained Hatch by a characteristically bomb-like explosion on the subject of his wrongs. In the course of a somewhat prolonged process of calming him Hatch had an inspiration, which a little later Fuller was invited to the conference to approve. After that the junior partners went back to their respective offices and Hatch sent for Goddard.

The young man responded with a pounding heart. Here, probably, was his opportunity, to be grasped after what he assumed would be the receipt of some casual instructions on office business. He would see what mood Hatch was in,—something depended on that,—and if the time seemed opportune he would speak.

Hatch's mood, he discovered when he entered the senior partner's office, was as mellow as an autumn day. There was a hint of sadness in it, for Hatch had

eaten a large luncheon and his stomach was reminding him that it was no longer quite as young as it had been; but that was a detail. He pushed a chair toward his clerk, a rare attention, and motioned toward an open box of cigars on his desk. With a smile of acknowledgment, David selected a cigar. Something was coming, and this was a time for watchful waiting. Hatch took out his own half-smoked cigar and looked at the glowing end of it, feeling rather pleased with himself. It was going to be a big moment for the youngster, and Hatch was human enough to enjoy being the god in another's machine.

"It's this spring you expect to pass your bar examination, is n't it?" he asked, casually.

"Yes, sir." The candidate's vivid blue eyes fixed themselves unwinkingly on the other's face.

"Have you any plans?" Hatch asked, restoring his cigar to his mouth and leaning back in his big swivel chair, with the air of one prepared to hear all about them if he had.

"No new ones," the young man admitted. "I hoped from your remarks at the time of my various loans that you would want me to stay on here for another year or so—till I had paid them off, anyway."

Hatch made a gesture that eliminated the sordid topic of loans.

"We have a better idea than that," he said. "Kimball was in here a little while ago, feeling abused. He thinks he's overworked, and perhaps he is. I know I

am," Hatch lightly mentioned in passing. "We need some young blood in this office—Kimball has spoken of that several times—and we all think that if you would like a small partnership in the firm . . ."

Hatch paused significantly. He expected that the young fellow would be rather overwhelmed. The young fellow was, but he sat in a stunned and wretched silence. Surely a malignant fate had exhausted itself in this latest manifestation. To have his heart's desire flung at him in this fashion, when he could not possibly take it, might have been the turn of the screw, if the screw had not already made its final revolution. Hatch decided that he understood. The boy was a bit dazed, of course, and thinking about the financial end of the proposition.

"We assume that you would n't have much capital, if any," he went on kindly; "but that can be arranged, you know, like the matter of the loan."

"It is n't capital alone." David found his voice. "And I won't try to tell you, sir, how grateful I am for the opportunity. I shall never forget it. But—"

"You want to consult your wife before deciding? Quite right, of course," Hatch agreed, but with the expression of one who discovers a pin-prick in his balloon.

"Yes, sir." David decided to leave it there. When Hatch had heard what he had to say there would n't be any more talk about junior partnerships. No firm would be anxious to annex the hero of the town's com-



ing sensation. Neither would clients be eager to put their affairs into the hands of a young lawyer who had made so hopeless a mess of his own. "But just now," he went on desperately, "if you can spare a few moments I'll like to tell you—"

This, of course, was the time. Hatch would never be in a more receptive mood, even though he wore for the moment the resentful look of a Santa Claus whose gift had been unappreciated.

The bell on the telephone on Hatch's desk sang a soprano solo, and the lawyer, grasping the receiver with a curt, "Yes," listened to the monologue that poured into his ear, his pink face steadily brightening.

"I'll be there in twenty minutes," he proclaimed as the monologue ceased, and he turned to David with an expression he vainly tried to make judicial.

"I've got to leave at once," he hurriedly explained as he replaced the receiver and swept into a big drawer the papers on the top of his desk, "to meet some clients. What you have to tell me will keep till to-morrow, won't it?"

"Yes, sir, of course. And I can't express . . ." David's sensations were those of a trapped animal that sees the trap fly open. He was extremely grateful to the "clients," three of Hatch's friends who were in the habit of getting up a little rubber of bridge at the club at five o'clock several afternoons a week. Hatch's face softened. He had always liked this good-looking, upstanding young chap.

"I'm off, then," he said heartily. "Come in tomorrow right after lunch. In the meantime, talk things over with Dorinda. Good-by."

David opened the door into the hall for him and was stepping back when Hatch stopped, his good humor now wholly restored.

"One thing more," he said. "I haven't told you how much we appreciate the hustling you're doing these days. You have always been more than reliable, but since you came back Kimball says you're 'eating' your work. Given the same conditions, most young fellows would have felt justified in lying back on their oars."

"Thanks. I've been away a good deal, you know—"

"Forget it. You've more than made it up."

Hatch hustled off and David returned to his work, with a huge interrogation-point in his brain. He would have given four years of his life to know whether that offer of a partnership came because of his work or because he had married Dorinda Maxwell. He knew he deserved the tributes to his industry, for of late, especially, he had worked with the desperate purpose of conquering worry as work alone can do. He knew that his work itself was intelligent and efficient. But there was every chance that in normal conditions the members of the firm would have taken this and his fine fury of labor as no more than their due. He would never know how much, if at all, his effort and ability accounted for his opportunity. And what

difference did it make, since the opportunity itself was merely a momentary mirage? And where now were the high ambitions he had cherished and which the Butterflies had so scorned?

When he reached home Warren had a surprise for him. The patient was to dine downstairs. She was already dressed, and dinner was to be a little earlier than usual, with Warren as an added attraction.

"She says I need n't go home to dress, so I'll freshen up in your quarters and take a final look at your arm while I'm there. Unless I'm very much mistaken, we can leave off the splints hereafter."

The condition of the arm gratified him and he moved his hands up and down its length with a mock sigh.

"As a source of steady income I'm afraid I can't depend on the Goddards any longer," he conceded. "I've held Dorinda back a little for two reasons. One was that her nerves were shot to pieces and she needed the rest and medication. The other was that I thought it would be rather neat to dismiss you both at the same time. Don't tell her anything about the arm till she comes downstairs and sees for herself that it's out of its cradle. Maybe the discovery will cheer her up. Miss Allen has gone, leaving you her blessing," he went on expansively. "I've got to have her on a new case to-morrow, and she wanted a night with her family before she started."

David's face blazed. Confound these doctors, anyway, with their isinglass diplomacy! Probably War-

ren would look knowing all through dinner and would leave early with a paternal air that tempted his host to kick him down the front steps. At dinner, however, the host admitted that he had done Warren an injustice. The physician was at his social best. He was as useful as a cheer-leader in the moments when Dorinda was exclaiming over the uncradled arm, and later, at the table, he led the conversation, though both David and Dorinda talked with increasing ease and zest. Subsequently Warren sent a tribute to Kate which Annie repeated to that functionary almost with tears.

"Such a nice man!" Annie sighed. "We 'll miss him awful, now he ain't comin' here reg'lar. We 'll miss Miss Allen, too."

Kate remained indifferent to this final loss. The doctor was a man and a little bit of all right, but she for one had had enough of trained nurses and their trays.

"We 're goin' to be awful lonesome," Annie gloomily predicted. "With Miss Kitty gone and the two young men not comin' no more—"

"And you a tellin' me you was leavin' hevery time they did come," Kate coldly reminded her.

Annie sighed. Her emotions, though she could not have analyzed them, were much like those of world workers after the war. Conditions had been terrible and her soul had quailed under them; but she did not quite see how she was to adapt herself to the peaceful years ahead.

Warren lingered late, smoking and talking. It was

long after ten when he reluctantly rose, threw the stub of his last cigar into the fire, and announced his intention of going. The Goddards accompanied him to the front door and then, on an impulse almost as definite to each as the push of a hand, returned to the library fire.

As they walked back along the hall, Dorinda touched the released arm almost timidly.

"It's wonderful to have you really well again," she said. "Every time I looked at that arm my own ached."

David did not answer. He could not. As soon as they got back to the fire he would have to tell her of Hatch's offer and of the appointment for to-morrow, and that would mean the beginning of the end. The month's truce was up and the discussion would be on. He wondered if he could talk with this hideous, dry feeling in his throat, this intolerable weight on his chest, this impenetrable blackness enveloping his spirit.

"I wanted to ask you," Dorinda said as they settled in their chairs, "whether you talked to Mr. Hatch to-day."

David tried to smile at her, but all he produced was a cynical grin at life.

"He talked to me," he admitted. "He offered me a partnership." He described the incident without touching on its effect on himself and Dorinda listened with her gaze on the fire. "I'm to talk with him about our affairs to-morrow," he ended, "right after lunch."

She nodded and after that they sat still, each dread-

ing the next words, her look still on the flames, his gaze enveloping her. The last traces of the congestion following the accident had disappeared and the pallor and thinness due to her illness gave her an almost elf-like beauty. A sense of desolation rolled over him like an icy flood. How, without her, was he ever to re-furnish the empty space of his life? She was so near that by putting out a hand he could have touched her, yet she seemed so far away that the width of the world might have stretched between them. What was most definitely between them, however, was the memory of her words at the time of their bargain. If he ever loved her, she had said, she would despise and hate him. She would feel that he was breaking faith. But for this sickening memory he would have told her the truth, not with any hope but in response to the urge in the soul of man to tell woman of his love even when he knows the telling is vain.

At last she spoke.

"Will they hold this offer open so you can accept it, afterward?" she asked in a low voice.

"I doubt it."

"So do I. Our exploit won't be regarded as a recommendation, will it?"

"Not exactly."

She raised her hands from her lap and brought them together with an effect of desperation.

"Oh, what a mess I've made of things for you!" she cried out.



"We made the mess together," he reminded her, "and the result will be harder for you than for me."

"But it was my idea," she persisted; "and my failure."

He swallowed. Floods seemed rushing past his ears. If only they need not talk about it!

"We both failed," he said doggedly. "I want you to remember, always, that this has been a fifty-fifty business from start to finish. Neither of us can blame the other. Now, for God's sake," he broke out irrepresibly, "don't let 's say any more!"

As if accepting the words as a dismissal, she rose, and he rose, too, with a sigh of combined exhaustion and relief. He did not know that she had noticed it, but she caught it and looked up at him quickly. Something in his expression brought her heart to her mouth and she took a step forward.

"David!"

The next moment she was in his arms, held there for a wild moment in which the world danced and he danced with it. Then he released her and sank back in his chair, his face hidden in his hands.

"I won't have your pity," he groaned.

"David!"

She came and knelt beside him.

"I won't have reparation, either, if you've got any fool notion of that kind in your head," he persisted, raising his eyes to meet hers. "I won't have anything but you, Dorinda—all of you. I'm mad about you.



I know now I've been mad about you almost from the first. That's what has made it so hard. If I had n't cared I could have put it over; I could have kept steady. But with everything in me calling out for you . . . I've said it," he ended, dully. "Now go ahead and despise me and hate me as you said you would. But don't pity me or pet me, for I can't stand either pity or petting."

"You're an awful baby, David." She laughed chokily and there were tears in her eyes. "I suppose all men are. And as blind as bats, too, every one of them," said the newly qualified expert on men.

Kneeling on a level with him, she caught his black head between her hands and held it to her breast. He gulped like the little boy he seemed to her in that moment and his arms went around her again.

"What you will have and what you won't have!" she crooned, her cheek on the top of his head. "As if you had anything to say about it! I'm more in love than any girl ever was before or ever will be again. I have been, too, almost from the first, and that is what made me act so devilishly. I simply could n't stand being such a sentimental idiot, and going back on all my plans and beliefs. So it made me act like a fiend. I was trying to cure myself. But I don't mind it any more. I don't mind anything, now that I know you care, too. And I'll tell you one thing: I'm not going to lose my head completely and spoil you!"

"Oh, yes, you are! You're going to lose it completely, just as I've lost mine."

David spoke with lips close to her ear and with the exultation of one whose shaking voice is mingled with the music of the universe. But she held back a little and something in her look and tone steadied him.

"Do you know what I love most about you, Davy?" she asked. "It's your tenderness . . . and gentleness." He kissed her hands. "Do you know when I first admitted to myself that I loved you?" she went on. "It was the day you came into my room at Adneyport and laid your cheek against mine. I loved that. I've thought of it a thousand times since. Put your cheek against mine now, Davy."

He obeyed, and their faces clung together. Hers was wet.

"You'll have to be awfully patient with me," she murmured. "You know what a life I've had, and what a nature I've got, and how spoiled I am. I can't change completely, all at once. Probably there will be more 'spasms,' as you call them. But if you'll give me time, I'll make myself all over. For . . . I adore you!"

"That's all that matters," he told her, and now his eyes were wet. "Don't make too many changes. I want you as you are. But there will be a lot of changes in me," he went on unsteadily. "God knows there's need of them."

"Not many, *please*," she begged, while the smile he loved flashed out at him.

Annie, arriving five minutes later to see if the library wood-box needed refilling, saw them going upstairs side by side, young Mrs. Goddard encircled in the curve of her husband's arm.

"Now you won't have to say anything to Mr. Hatch to-morrow except that you will take the partnership," Dorinda beatifically murmured as they mounted. In her sitting-room she led him to a wide front window, and they stood for a moment looking out upon a white world over which a full moon cast a soft glow.

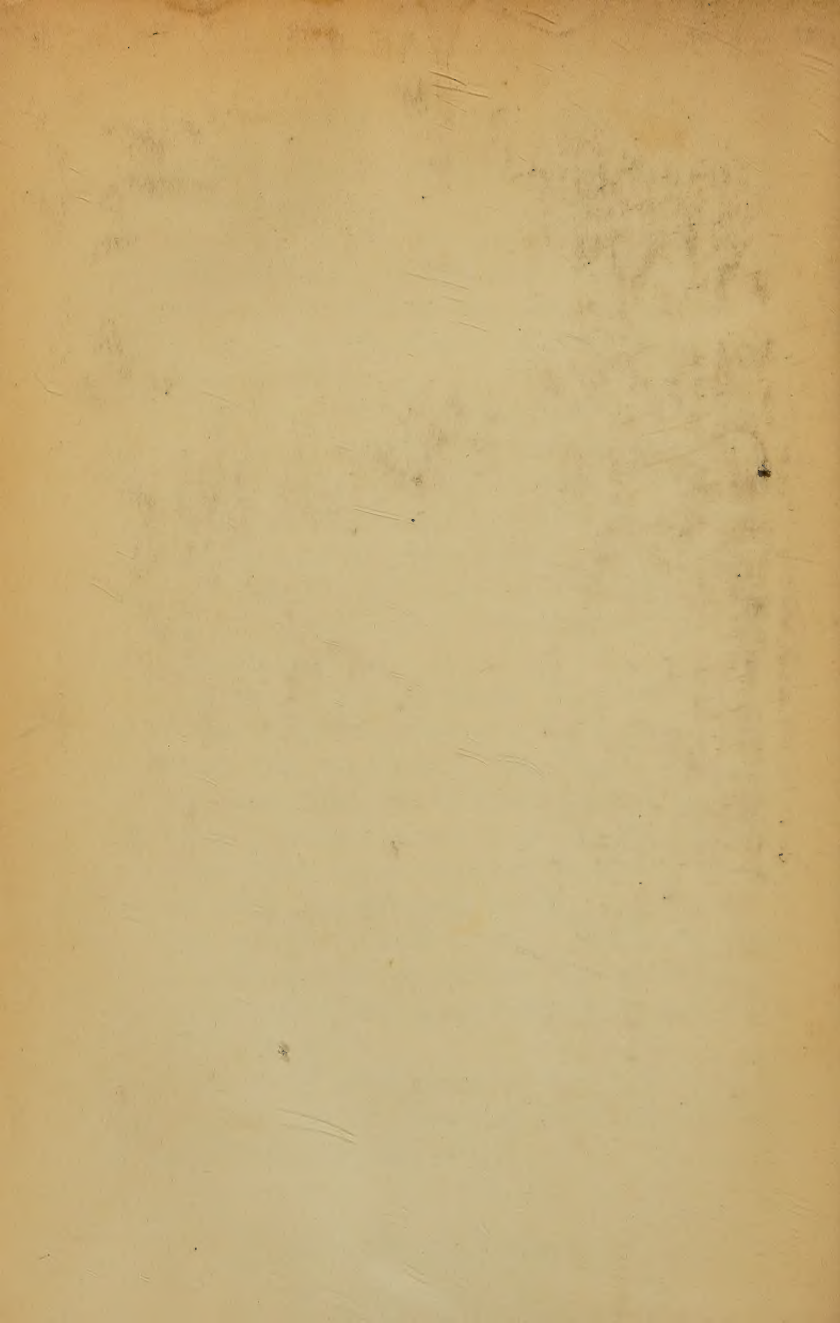
"It's a night for lovers," David breathed, his brown cheek against hers.

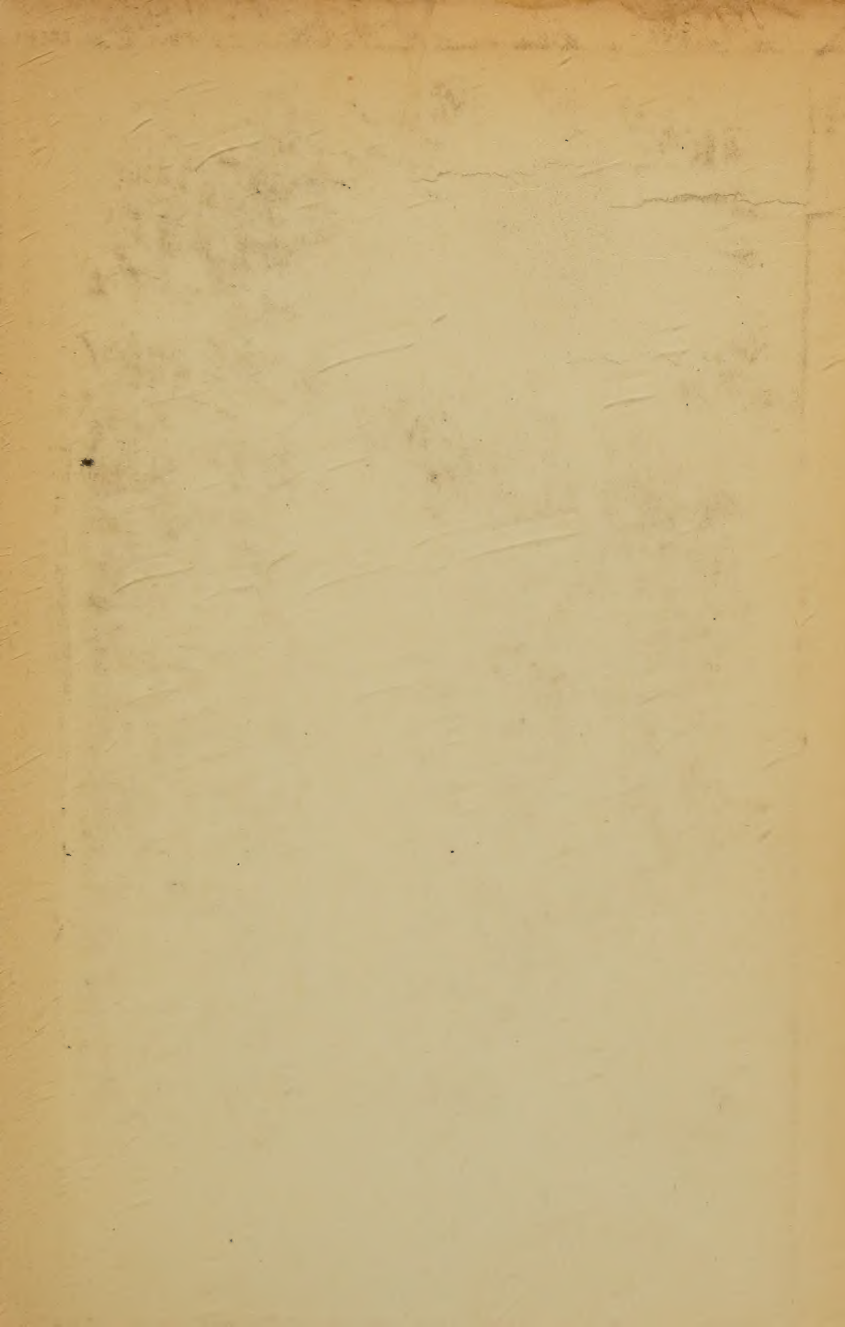
"I know it is, and made for us. I've been thinking all evening of the silly little song Kitty sang to tease us—'Ain't love wonderful?' Oh, David, how long ago that seems and how hideously lonely I have felt ever since, thinking I'd have to go through life without you! Now, somehow, if the world held no one but you and me, it would seem enough."

"Quite enough," David agreed. "We'll see about clearing out the rest to-morrow. In the meantime, darling, though we've been married two months, here's our first real kiss."

The picture on which the moon looked down was a charming one, but the burned-out planet slipped indifferently behind a passing cloud.











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